let your heart hold fast

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at https://archiveofourown.org/works/53634658.

Rating:	Explicit
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	人渣反派自救系统 - 墨香铜臭 | The Scum Villain's Self-Saving System - Mòxiāng Tóngxiù
Relationship:	Original Luo Binghe/Shen Yuan | Shen Qingqiu
Characters:	Original Luo Binghe, Shen Yuan | Shen Qingqiu, Shen Yuan | Shen Qingqiu's Family, Original Ning Yingying
Additional Tags:	bingge to bingmei pipeline, explicit content will be tagged as it happens, Compulsory Heterosexuality, idk if thats a lesbian only term but im a lesbian and binggeyuan is yuri to me so, Top Original Luo Binghe, Bottom Shen Yuan | Shen Qingqiu, part of a series but it makes sense as a standalone, Sick Character, Masturbation, Sex Toys, Anal Sex
Language:	English
Series:	Part 2 of bingy's self-insertverse
Stats:	Published: 2024-02-09 Completed: 2025-06-18 Words: 55,329 Chapters: 8/8

let your heart hold fast

by Allpiesforourown

Summary

They shared a few similarities- the light brown shade of his eyes, the elegant slope of Shen Qingqiu's nose- but that was the end of it. Thick frames covered a third of the man's face, and unlike Shen Qingqiu's flawless complexion, this stranger's skin was grey and dull.

/Luo Binghe has been searching endlessly for a way back to that kind Shen Qingqiu. For some reason, he keeps running into a frail young man by the name of Shen Yuan.

Notes

Hello everyoneee

so this ended up being written faster than expected. i was initially going to make this a oneshot, but it got longer than expected and i really dont think anyone wants to read 30k words in one sitting, so i broke it up

Chapter 1: always searching, always blind

There was someone else in the room with Luo Binghe.

He could feel eyes on him the second he regained consciousness, along with careful hands pushing his body into position. The soft cotton underneath him told Luo Binghe he was laid upon a bed. He discreetly opened an eye to catch sight of the other person.

The room was covered in darkness, a thin sliver of light shining in from the nearly closed door. That didn't matter to a heavenly demon, of course- he could easily make out each detail about the man hovering over him.

Binghe's sigh of disappointment caught the other's attention, but he really couldn't care. One more trip, and another dead end without the person he'd been searching for.

They shared a few similarities- the light brown shade of his eyes, the elegant slope of Shen Qingqiu's nose- but that was the end of it. Thick frames covered a third of the man's face, and unlike Shen Qingqiu's flawless complexion, this stranger's skin was grey and dull.

Upon seeing this man, however, very few would look at his face. He was shamelessly baring his arms and legs, and even what he'd covered up was behind one thin layer!

And his hair! After being married to Sha Hualing for so many years, Luo Binghe thought he'd seen it all- but even the most shameless demons wouldn't dare cut their hair so short!

Waking in a scantily clad stranger's bed. While it certainly wasn't the first time this situation had occurred, it was certainly the first time with a man.

"You're awake!" He exclaimed. "How are you feeling?"

The second Binghe pushed himself off the bed, he threw his outer robe at the shameless human. "Cover up. This lord has no interest in your pathetic body."

His host's mouth dropped, then closed, then opened again, struggling to form words in his shock. Finally, he inhaled deeply and glared at Luo Binghe, tossing the robe back at him. "Well, this *pathetic one* is glad *my lord* is feeling better. Feel free to leave anytime you like."

"Careful," Binghe warned.

"I thought you were Luo Binghe," the small man continued stubbornly. "I thought you repaid kindness a thousandfold."

Binghe sneered. "Ah, of course. That's why you dragged this lord to your home. How selfless."

"I see," he replied coldly. "So if I expect gratitude, I'm selfish. If I don't expect anything in return, you can mistreat me."

…why was he arguing with this cipher? He had better things to do. “Where is my sword?”

The stranger huffed and walked to the room’s entrance, shedding more light through the opened door. "I'll bring it."

Humans could not touch Xin Mo, but Binghe did not inform him of that. It would be funny, watching this haughty, prideful man screech in agony as the sword devoured his mind.

Left alone, he explored the small room. There were many objects he didn’t recognize, and the few he did had extremely alien designs.

His ears perked up at the near interceptable sound they’d picked up.

Swoosh! Thunk! Swoosh! Thunk!

What was that?

Luo Binghe didn’t need to wonder for long. The door opened wider. The man had returned, and in his hand was… a mop.

Swoosh! Binghe watched with disbelief as the stranger swung the mop and hit Xin Mo with all his force.

Thunk! Xin Mo slid against the wooden floor and landed right at Luo Binghe’s feet.

“Phew,” he wiped at his face. “Here’s your sword!”

Binghe could hear his heartbeat pounding erratically from across the room. Not out of fear, as it should have been, but rather out of simple physical exertion. “You… hit it,” Luo Binghe said slowly. “Xin Mo. You hit the strongest sword in the combined realms with a *mop.”*

He shrugged. "Well, I can't exactly just pick it up, can I?"

Xin Mo shook with rage before him. Somehow, bending down to pick it up felt like a defeat.

Luo Binghe slashed at the air with his weapon, opening a portal back to his own world. He sent one last glance at the man watching him. "This lord will not murder you for your insolence."

"How generous," he replied dryly.

Binghe scowled and stepped through.

Why did it feel like he’d come out the loser from this trip?

After many weeks, he had time to continue his search.

Take me to Shen Qingqiu this time, Binghe reminded Xin Mo. Once again, Binghe stepped through the portal expecting the bamboo house and found himself behind the small man he'd met during his last attempt.

"It seems you insist on being an obstacle," Luo Binghe stated. The man jolted and whipped his head around to stare at him.

At least this time he'd covered himself a bit more- other than the thick beige outer layer covering his arms, there was also a sky-blue mask around his mouth and nose, reminding him of the veil Mingyan wore.

Binghe pointed Xin Mo at him. "Will you insist on getting in this lord's way until he cuts you down?"

The weak man tilted his head up (honestly, he was shorter than most of his wives) to give Binghe an unimpressed glare. "I'm just standing here!"

A beast's bray caught Binghe's attention, but the small human grabbed his outer layer and pulled him back quickly. A coach of some kind whizzed by at lightning speed, narrowly missing him.

"Ah, stay on the sidewalk!" The stranger exclaimed.

That was twice now this man had helped him. Neither times were strictly *necessary,* but Binghe was a magnanimous enough emperor to grant leniency. "Luo Binghe," he introduced himself.

He blinked back at the demon lord. "What?"

"This lord is known as Luo Binghe," Binghe repeated with much less patience.

"Um, Shen Yuan," the human answered in turn. "I… already knew who you were." The man- Shen Yuan- furrowed his brow. "Not a lot of emperors with glowing huadians and demonic swords."

Shen Yuan recognized him? "Does that mean there is a copy of me in this world?" Excitement rose in his chest- that meant there could be a copy of Shen Qingqiu!

"Uh, no? You don't exist here…"

Luo Binghe exhaled deeply, attempting to stay calm. Why was it he never felt anything but disappointment around this man!? He marched away from Shen Yuan, hoping to stomp off his frustrations, and was pulled back once again. "What!?"

"Don't walk into the road, it's dangerous!" The short man grasped Lup Binghe's hand gently, guiding him towards the other direction. "I know a park nearby, okay? Then you can teleport home."

Shen Yuan led him through the strange grey city, purposely avoiding any other groups of people. Nowadays, a procession followed the emperor whenever he graced a town with his presence. Being guided through an empty street… Binghe felt a pang of pain as he remembered his outings with his mother, the way they'd swing their arms as they walked. This stranger even had the sickly pallor he'd seen on her during her final days. All of a sudden he had the intense urge to hold Shen Yuan in his arms and protect him, to feed him every delicious and luxurious meal he could never give the most important woman in his life-

He snapped out of the strange thoughts with a shake of his head. Xin Mo must have been messing with him again.

They came to a stop at a little clearing surrounded by trees. There was one swing set, a slide, and a miniature horse on a spring. Binghe felt calmed by the sight. This, he could understand. Shen Yuan all but collapsed onto the swing, taking off his face mask. “You probably have questions.”

"No need," Luo Binghe answered. "This lord has already figured out the truth.”

Shen raised a brow. “The truth?”

“You are a woman."

“...what."

Binghe circled around his companion, raking his eyes up and down that small body from various angles. “There is a reason Xin Mo insists on bringing this lord to you.” Shen Yuan stiffened under the scrutiny. "This would not be the first time I've met a wife under disguise as a man."

"I think it's time for Lord Luo to return to his world," Shen Yuan replied rather coldly.

“It is not the first time a wife has played coy, either,” Binghe said with a wink. With the feeling of Shen Yuan’s angry stare on his back, Luo Binghe prepared to teleport to his world. “This lord will return when Shen Yuan is ready.”

He left before he could hear a response.

Binghe did not immediately run back to Shen Yuan.

He had an empire to run, enemies to vanquish, and wives to please. Shizuns from alternate worlds to chase down.

After two weeks, he finally decided it had been long enough and cut open a portal with Xin Mo. Steam blew into his face. He landed in a hot tiled room with a series of porcelain

structures, and found Shen Yuan hiding behind a curtain, naked and screaming. "So Shen Yuan *is* a man."

“What the hell!” Shen Yuan screeched furiously, failing to cover his body with his thin arms. “Get out!”

Rain was falling atop him, the water coming out of a metal knob. Not only was it flowing without any pumping, it was *warm,* clearly created with the purpose of washing. It was a bit irritating to know a commoner had more advanced technology around his house than an emperor’s palace.

Binghe rarely regretted merging the realms, but one thing he did miss was the human world's gentle weather. He couldn't exactly kiss his wives in the rain when the sky was spitting down acid.

Well, he could. But it wouldn’t be very romantic.

"How does this mechanism operate?" Binghe tapped at the device with his finger.

“Can you get out!” Shen Yuan continued.

Binghe glowered down at the skinny man. “So now you care about modesty?”

Shen Yuan muttered something in another language, stepping out of the tub and hastily throwing a towel over himself. When he fled the bathing room, Binghe was left alone to tinker with the device. There were little handles that could control both the speed of the water and its temperature. How fascinating.

“Ahem.” Shen Yuan had returned wearing a fluffy white robe and glasses, standing in the room’s doorway with his arms crossed. "Is this going to be an everyday occurrence?"

“Seeing Shen Yuan naked?” Luo Binghe teased. “Do you want it to be?”

“Still not a girl. What are you doing?”

Binghe turned the water off. “Where did you acquire this artefact?”

“The shower? Everyone has them.” Shen Yuan hummed in thought. “But there aren’t exactly plumbers in your world… come.”

The man turned and walked off before Binghe could even reply. The audacity! Telling the emperor to follow after him like some pet!

Luo Binghe trailed after him, taking in Shen Yuan’s home. It was simple, yet far from humble. The sofa he’d seated himself on may have had a quiet design, but Binghe could tell it was made from high quality leathers.

While he studied the extremely lifelike portrait of Shen Yuan and his family (?), the man in question called out to him. “Is Lord Luo going to sit?”

Treating him with disrespect one moment and then acknowledging him as the emperor the next. Even as his interest grew, Binghe remained standing. Shen Yuan sighed and opened up yet another mysterious object.

“This is a laptop,” Shen Yuan explained. “It’s a portable computer. It has the internet on it, which can answer almost any questions you might have.” He glanced at Binghe. “Let me know if I’m going too fast. I know that’s a lot of words at once.”

If he’d heard such a statement from anyone else, Binghe would have ripped their head off. But Shen Yuan said it with surprising sincerity, so he opted to settle for flashing his eyes red. “Laptop, computer, internet. Does Shen Yuan think this lord is incapable of remembering three words?”

“...right.” He turned the ‘laptop’ to face Binghe.

*Shower - Wikipedia: A **shower** is a place in which a person bathes under a spray of typically warm or hot water . Indoors, there is a drain in the floor.*

Alongside the article was another extremely detailed and realistic picture.

“Where it says ‘search’, you can type in what you want to know and learn basically anything.” Shen Yuan continued. As if he’d read Binghe’s mind, he said, “you’re probably wondering about this photo, right?”

Binghe finally moved closer, sitting next to Shen Yuan. “Mhm.”

~~Shen Yuan smelled nice.~~

“That’s a photograph.” He picked the device up and placed it onto Luo Binghe’s thighs. “Just hit the keys to- oh, you don’t know English…” Shen Yuan tapped the laptop a few more times, until a similar board of letters appeared in characters he was familiar with. “Okay, now you can search for whatever you want…”

Shen Yuan’s lesson was thorough. The other man excitedly led him through the ‘website’ to answer more and more of Binghe’s unvoiced questions.

Shen Yuan yawned, then gasped. “It’s already one…!” He cleared his throat, pointing at the corner of the screen. “Here you can check the time and date. I’ll leave you to look up this world’s calendar… I have to sleep.” Binghe watched him stretch his arms and walk across the room. Shen Yuan placed a hand on a doorknob, then paused and glanced back at him. “Are you going to kill me in my sleep?”

Laughter burst out of him. “Do you want me to?”

Shen Yuan answered seriously, “I would prefer it if you didn’t.”

Still amused, Binghe shook his head. “Then in exchange for Shen Yuan’s information, this lord will spare him.”

Shen Yuan smiled. “Okay. Goodnight, Luo Binghe.”

For some reason, he couldn't tear his eyes away from the door, long after Shen Yuan had closed it behind him. Those simple words had struck a strange chord with him. *Goodnight, Luo Binghe.* Binghe contemplated it and realized he… couldn't recall the last time someone had wished him goodnight.

He shook his head. Right now he had more important things to think about.

It was admittedly a bit difficult to begin his research. There was an overwhelming amount of technological advancement compared to Binghe's world, and Shen Yuan's scent lingered distractingly.

~~Why did Shen Yuan smell so nice?~~

Binghe studied well into the night. It was actually quite refreshing. He'd always had a thirst for knowledge, one that Cang Qiong never indulged- and Shen Yuan had just handed him a magical tablet that held all the knowledge this new land had to offer.

He drank in the texts greedily, memorizing blueprints to take back to his palace. Many of these inventions did seem to be direct reflections of magical artefacts Luo Binghe owned. The 'record player' seemed to serve the exact same purpose as the Radiant Spin Crystal.

He was halfway through the reading on air travel when the laptop's screen went black. Pressing various buttons did nothing, so he slammed Shen Yuan's bedroom door open.

Shen Yuan flailed, sitting up in a daze. "Wha- huh?"

"The laptop's turned off."

The man in the bed raked his hand over his face, sighing. "It's four in the morning…"

Binghe tapped his foot impatiently. "Fix it. Now."

It took several minutes of groaning before he actually crawled out of bed. "It just needs to be charged. See the metal part here?" Shen Yuan pointed at the prongs sticking out of the charger's black end. "They're surrounded by rubber. Rubber doesn't conduct electricity, which means it's safe for you to plug in." He inserted the prongs into the *outlet* and the charger lit up. "Don't stick anything metal into the outlet unless you're protected," Shen Yuan continued. "You'll probably be fine, but that kind of shock of energy can kill people."

Even half asleep, Shen Yuan insisted on such an in depth lesson. Luo Binghge gave a dry laugh. "It seems I found a teacher after all."

Shen Yuan turned the laptop on again, looking over at Binghe curiously. "A teacher?"

"This one has been in search of a master," Binghe answered vaguely.

"You mean like…" Shen Yuan gently extracted a small book from his shelf, snapping it open to cover his face like it was a fan. In an instant, his face became cold and emotionless as he looked down on Binghe. With an unconcerned air, he regarded the demon lord as if he was an interesting fly. "This master will be sending you for a night hunt," he drolled, "see to it you

do not tarnish the sect's reputation." Then, Shen Yuan snapped the book shut and returned to his usual smile, and the air around him changed back just as quick. "Like that?"

Luo Binghe was speechless.

"Yes," he finally answered in a daze. "Like that."

Shen Yuan yawned, completely unaware of how much he'd affected Luo Binghe. "Well, let me know if you need anything else." He stopped on the threshold of his bedroom, standing in the doorway as he gave Binghe a playful grin. "This one will be in his chambers, if Luo Binghe dares disturb his shizun."

When the door closed behind him, Binghe was left to his thoughts. The aloof and stony way Shen Yuan had spoken from behind his make-believe fan was nearly identical to his scummy teacher.

But that teasing lilt afterwards, the almost humorous way he'd called himself *shizun*... that was exactly like the Shen Qingqiu he'd been chasing after.

[OP] How would you, hypothetically, explain the concept of electricity to a 200 year old xianxia emperor from a magical land?

> me at 3am: I have to go to sleep. my brain: how would I explain electricity to a 200 year old xianxia emperor from a magical land

*> "this edible ain't shit" *two hours later* how do I explain electricity to a 200 year old xianxia emperor from a magical land*

> ytube is a blessing! whenever my kids have questions I can just put on an educational video and usually I'll learn something too!

*>> **edited. [OP]** An emperor would find those children's videos condescending*

***see original:** Tried that. He found the videos condescending and blew up my PC*

> lI'd give him a dorito and see if it kills him

*>> **[OP]** The emperor would find it very underwhelming, and say the only reason he hasn't killed you for making him eat such garbage is that he wants you alive to tell him how electricity works.*

> make him watch cocomelon

*>> **[OP]** Do you guys just want me to die.*

*>>> **[OP]** Okay, update to Cocomelon. He hasn't moved in 5 hours. Not for a drink, not for the washroom, nothing. I'm not sure he's even blinked the whole time…*

>>>> Doctor here! Watching Cocomelon actually makes you explode!

*>>>>> **[OP]** Do you all have nothing better to do?*

>>>>>> Hey ur here too

*>>>>>>> **[OP]** Okay, fair.*

> him: she seems so distant lately is she cheating her: how do i explain electricity to a 200 year old xianxia emperor from a magical land

> need more info

*>> **[OP]** What do you need to know?*

>>> have you been taking your meds

*>>>> **[OP]** Yeah. I'd be dead if I stopped taking them.*

>>>>> oh.. Fuck now i feel bad. Sorry dude. Hope you get better

*>>>>>> **[OP]** It's fine. Thank you, but let's stay on topic.*

>>>>>>> yo peerless cucumber lore is actually sad??

>>>>>>>> peerless cucumber is not a real person. like miku and jerma

> You're taking this specific hypothetical very seriously

*>> **[OP]** I'm writing a book about a reverse transmigrator.*

>>> HOLY SHIT GOU GYTS . PEERLESS CUCUMBER IS WRITTING A FUCIING SELF INSERT BINGGE FANFIC

*>>>> **[OP]** FUCK OFF BINGHE IS NOT THE ONLY EMPEROR EVER WRITTEN.*

>>>>> i speak for everyone on this god forsaken site when I say we support you bro

> OMG congrats on coming out!!

*>> **[OP]** What???*

> congrats on coming out king

*>> **[OP]** I'm not gay!*

> Congrats on coming out king 🏳️🌈

*>> **[OP]** Very funny, you guys.*

> congrats on coming out king!!!

*>> **[OP]** How many of you are going to comment this?*

> be who you are for your pRiiiDe

*>> **[OP]** I hate you all.*

> Congratulations on the gay self insert fanfic cucumber bro

*>> **[OP]** That's it. Next person to say this, I'm just straight up going to say something that will get me banned*

> congrats on coming out king

[Moderator has deleted reply.]

Binghe's eyes roamed over the words, understanding barely any of them. Eventually he picked up the laptop and entered the modest kitchen. "What is fanfic?"

"Fuck!" Shen Yuan jumped. Hot water and noodles poured onto the tiled floor, knocked off the counter in surprise. “Fuck!” Shen Yuan repeated again.

Binghe watched him throw paper napkins onto the mess. “...what is fanfic.”

Shen Yuan slumped against the kitchen’s wooden drawers. “Are you really going to be here everyday?”

Luo Binghe’s eye darted to the laptop, where the date and time was displayed. Although he’d gone back to his world for an entire week, the device only recorded one day passing for Shen Yuan. Binghe tucked that piece of knowledge away and continued. “Answer this lord’s question.”

Shen Yuan’s extremely miserable expression was wonderful to drink in. “It’s… stories.” He glanced at the laptop, his face crumpling into apprehension. “Stories written by fans.”

Binghe cocked his head. “And there are stories of this lord?”

“You don’t want to read them,” Shen Yuan whispered.

Binghe grinned. “On the contrary, I do.”

After sufficient coercion, his host opened a website full of ‘fanfics’ written by those who revered him. His grin growing wider and wider in amusement, he picked out the most interesting sounding stories and read them out loud to Shen Yuan. According to him, the one most ‘in character’ was a story where Binghe ascended to godhood and made love to the goddesses in heaven. Shen Yuan’s least favourite was one where Binghe had a *soul mate* , and one night of dual cultivation with her was enough to stave off Xin Mo for months.

After a handful of sob stories about Binghe finding ‘true happiness’, he turned to a fanfiction marked explicit.

“‘Luo Binghe squeezes your breasts,’” Binghe read aloud. “‘You never would have thought a simple run in with a stranger would lead to you being pounded into a public wall by the emperor himself.’” He hummed in approval. “This is very accurate, that is indeed the course of action this lord would take."

Luo Binghe waited for Shen Yuan to rant about the plot, as he had with the other stories, but the man remained silent. Binghe grinned with pure joy when he saw how flustered his host had become.

Unshakeable Shen Yuan, who was ever so casual about his own death, finally had a reaction.

"Shen Yuan's face is red," Binghe commented, and watched with glee when Shen Yuan jolted.

"I'm getting second hand embarrassment for whoever wrote that!" Shen Yuan insisted. "How can I not, with you reading that garbage out loud!?"

He quickly memorized the rest of the page before abandoning the device. Luo Binghe moved closer, crowding Shen Yuan against the side of the sofa. His hand glided across the seat and caged the other man in place with his arms. "'The emperor's hands come to rest over your chest, playing with your sensitive nipples…'" Binghe recited, maybe just putting a bit more effort into making his voice sound sexy as their faces inched closer. "'You beg for him to spend inside you.'"

Shen Yuan froze stiff in panic, his cheeks deepening into a lovely pink shade as he stared at Binghe with wide eyes. "Stop it…" His heart was pounding again. And this time it wasn't just from something like a little exercise.

During his time in the Endless Abyss, Luo Binghe had learned to enjoy tormenting his food and watching it squirm. When he squeezed Shen Yuan's waist, the little yelp that escaped the man was incredibly entertaining.

"'But Luo Binghe won't let you go that easily. He's going to use you for as long as he pleases.'" When Shen Yuan turned his face away, Binghe grabbed his chin with his spare hands, forcing him to look back. Their lips were nearly touching- Binghe could feel the other man's breath against his mouth. Shen Yuan swallowed nervously, and Binghe watched his throat bob. "'Perhaps your place is here, on the emperor's cock… you'd love to be one of his little toys for the rest of your life-'"

Shen Yuan pushed at Binghe's chest. "Get off."

"Come now, is Yuan-er feeling shy?"

He couldn't tease much more than that. Shen Yuan's heartbeat had become abnormally irregular, and one of his hands came to squeeze at his chest like he was in pain. The grin slid off Binghe's face in an instant. "Stop," Shen Yuan rasped.

The sudden drop in mood had Binghe pulling back, confused. Shen Yuan pushed himself onto his feet, then paused in a daze, as if that small amount of movement had taken too much out of him. He didn't even look in Binghe's direction as he walked away and closed the door separating his bedroom from the main lounging area.

Just a few minutes ago, he'd been teasing Shen Yuan and enjoying himself. Sitting alone, a hollow feeling sprouted in Binghe's chest.

He followed after him, and found the door locked. Binghe huffed in irritation before summoning a fireball hot enough to melt the metal handle and swung the door open.

Shen Yuan was sitting in the dark, a band of cloth wrapped right above his elbow. A small machine in front of him flashed a series of numbers, and he ripped the sleeve off. "Usually when a door is locked, that's a sign to leave it be."

"You seem better already," he commented.

So come back already, his traitorous heart whispered.

Shen Yuan sighed and gave Binghe an exhausted frown before turning his back to him. "Leave me alone, Luo Binghe."

…fine. It wasn't as if he was lacking company. Luo Binghe left Shen Yuan's quarters and picked up Xin Mo where it was leaning against the sofa.

Then he put it back down and picked up the laptop. Closing the tabs with the fanfics, he returned to researching this world. He couldn't read a thing as he scrolled the webpages, however. His attention was solely focused on Shen Yuan's breathing slowly evening out in the other room.

Shen Yuan slept for fifteen hours straight.

Luo Binghe frequently snuck into the room, making sure the man was still alive. Everytime Shen Yuan's breathing would pause, Binghe would hold his breath along with him, refusing to relax his tensed shoulders until Shen Yuan inhaled again.

Shen Yuan was… informative. It would be annoying having to find someone else to teach him about this world.

Instead of using the laptop to look for blueprints to take back to his palace, Luo Binghe searched for how to use the appliances in Shen Yuan's kitchen. Payment information and the home's address was automatically saved into the device, so Binghe ordered groceries online.

By the time Shen Yuan woke up, Luo Binghe had practically prepared a feast spread across the table.

"Okay, new rule," Shen Yuan said as he stared at the food. "I thought this went without saying, but you're not allowed to bring women here. I don't want to hear 'heaving breasts' and-"

"It's for you," Binghe interrupted.

Shen Yuan's eyes were always a delicate and sharp shape, but now they became so round in his surprise that Luo Binghe had to force down a grin. "For-for me?"

Cute.

Binghe pulled out a chair, gesturing for him to sit. Shen Yuan followed, visibly flustered. It was clear he wasn't going to talk first, so Luo Binghe coaxed him by placing several dishes on his plate. "Start with the lettuce wraps for an appetizer, or Shen Yuan can skip right to the rice if he prefers."

Shen Yuan preferred… everything. Binghe watched, amazed, as the small man put away a considerable amount of food. Where in the world was all of it going?

Shen Yuan had the most overjoyed smile Binghe had ever seen on him as he ate his way through another plate. By the time he'd reached the sponge cake signifying the end of the

meal, Shen Yuan chewed slower as if he was trying to savour it as long as possible. When it was done, he looked down at his empty plate remorsefully.

Really, really cute.

Binghe leaned his elbows on the tabletop, grinning at his host. “I take it Shen Yuan enjoyed breakfast?”

Shen Yuan blushed, dabbing at his mouth with a napkin as if he was trying to hide behind it. “...it was okay.”

Luo Binghe couldn’t suppress his laughter.

Chapter 2: all my days are spent

Chapter Notes

> hi everyone !! sorry if my updates are very irregular from this point forward.. after years spent trying to fix my broken family i have finally given up on them! (๑ > ᴗ < ๑) i'm completely broke and selling my things so i can leave home and stay with my beta reader in another country <3 this really throws the "i dropped out of school" authours note from my last fic out of the park huh?
>
> anyway, heres gay people being silly

“Luo Binghe likes peaches, right?” Back from his outing, Shen Yuan set a paper box atop the dining table. “Our family’s chef makes the best peach pie, so I brought some home.”

Binghe *did* like peaches. He didn’t remember ever telling Shen Yuan that.

It had been weeks since Luo Binghe became a regular visitor at Shen Yuan’s apartment, and his host had practically given the guest bedroom to him, free of charge. Here was what he’d learned so far about this world:

There was no cultivation here, although Luo Binghe could freely use his. In comparison, his demonic powers were incredibly muted in this world. He could enter dreams, but they’d be out of his control, and his blood parasites could track a person, but nothing more. Even Xin Mo had fallen silent for the first time since its creation. It could still take him back to his realm when he desired, but otherwise didn’t emit any of its demonic energy. It was incredibly refreshing.

Shen Yuan theorised this was because there were no demons in his world. “But that implies your cultivation still works because cultivators exist here,” he mused as they ate the pie. “If cultivation is real and I missed out, I’ll be super annoyed.”

Shen Yuan had been perfectly courteous while he accommodated him. Luo Binghe was becoming more and more wary of the man everyday. He wasn’t naive enough to think someone would offer their home to a stranger with zero ulterior motives.

Sometimes Shen Yuan would conversationally ask, ‘what has Luo Binghe learned today?’ over tea, and listen to Binghe’s discoveries with a smile. Like he *wanted* to know about Binghe’s dull research. Other times he was pampering him with gift after gift.

Luo Binghe pondered the matter as he pressed a key on the large instrument in Shen Yuan’s living room. A piano, according to what he’d seen online. He could identify the notes as they

rang out, and in less than a few minutes, he'd had a complete understanding of its mechanism.

Shen Yuan popped his head in from the kitchen and watched Binghe with interest. After some time he joined Binghe on the small bench.

"Keep your fingers spread out so you can get all the notes easily," he demonstrated. He tucked his thumb towards his palm before moving his hand. "And when you're moving up, place your thumb on the lowest note you'll be playing."

Shen Yuan never, *never,* ignored an opportunity to teach Binghe something.

When Binghe mimicked the movement, Shen Yuan's fingers probed into the spaces between his own and spread them out. "Now use your thumb to press down here…" Shen Yuan gently pushed Binghe's thumb down until a clear sound rang out. "That's the middle G."

His side was pressed up against Binghe's until he could smell Shen Yuan's distinctive scent. Shen Yuan said something and guided their entwined hands across the keys. Luo Binghe felt like an idiot for not realizing it sooner- of course Shen Yuan had been so sweet and hospitable. He was *seducing* him.

Luo Binghe looked Shen Yuan over. Admittedly, he wasn't *ugly.* Just frumpy. He'd never considered men before, but considering how things went with Shen Qingqiu, perhaps that didn't matter anymore.

…or maybe Shen Yuan wasn't trying to seduce him at all? Maybe this *was* normal for a teacher. Maybe this was how Shen Qingqiu taught guqin to everyone except for him. But then Shen Yuan smiled and praised him for his quick learning, and Luo Binghe threw the notion away immediately. There was no way that was possible.

He wouldn't mind taking Shen Yuan. At the very least, it would be a new experience.

"Shen Yuan's fingers are quite agile," Binghe purred. "I wonder what else they can do?"

"Harass web novelists," Shen Yuan answered.

Binghe imagined bending Shen Yuan over the piano. His body was so thin and bony, but there was also something satisfying about the idea of holding down someone so weak and small. Shen Yuan was always so composed and coolheaded, it would be so rewarding to watch him struggle before submitting to him. No, he wouldn't mind taking Shen Yuan at *all.*

"It's so cruel to keep your talented hands all to yourself," BInghe continued. "Shouldn't Shen Yuan use his skill on this lord?"

"You… want me to be your piano teacher?"

"While I wouldn't mind that…" If Shen Yuan wanted to play coy, Binghe was fine with being the forward one. He knew from experience the ones who tried to look innocent were usually the filthiest. Luo Binghe placed a hand on Shen Yuan's back, pulling him closer by the waist. Shen Yuan looked up at him in surprise, holding onto Binghe's chest for balance, and Binghe

placed his other hand on the man's thigh. "This lord was hoping to teach Shen Yuan some things as well."

Shen Yuan lit up. "Deal!" Binghe raised a brow when the short man jumped off and ran to his bedroom, leaving his door open for his voice to carry out. "I hope I still have everything we need… it's been a while."

The words nearly knocked Binghe off the bench. "Shen Yuan has done this before?"

There were sounds of rustling. "My sister had a classmate she brought over sometimes when she was younger, and he always begged me to. He was so cute, I couldn't say no!"

Luo Binghe couldn't believe it. All that coquettish and shy behaviour, and Shen Yuan wasn't even a virgin!?

Shen Yuan returned with a book and placed it on the piano's rack. "I'll start with teaching you how to read modern notation. I'm not sure how sheet music looks in your time-"

"What are you doing," Binghe interrupted.

"Teaching you piano?" Shen Yuan said slowly. "I'll teach you piano and you can tell me about your world. That's what you said earlier, right?"

"...yes," Binghe lied.

Shen Yuan *was* a very good teacher. Half an hour into their lesson, Binghe could already read this new notation system and play the appropriate notes. Music was one of Qing Jing's specialties- Shen Yuan would have done well as a senior disciple mentoring the juniors, or even as the peak lord.

"Does this mean I have to call you shizun now?" Binghe mused.

Shen Yuan turned to the next chapter. "Only if I get to keep my limbs."

…it wasn't fair, how Shen Yuan could force a snort out of him even when Binghe was disappointed.

Around the one month mark, Luo Binghe curled up on the couch and closed his eyes.

He still hadn't found out what Shen Yuan was after. He did not make any sexual advances, nor did he try to harm Binghe in any way. So this was his plan: pretend to be asleep in their shared space.

A potential wife would do something romantic, like lay a blanket over his sleeping form or use this opportunity to steal a kiss. An enemy would stupidly start talking to himself and

expose his future plan to thwart Luo Binghe.

What would Shen Yuan do? How would he expose himself?

He left the TV running, to imply he'd fallen asleep during a movie like Shen Yuan often did. Then, he waited.

He heard Shen Yuan enter the living room. "Binghe?"

…

"Are you pretending to be asleep?"

Binghe stayed still and continued his act.

"I know you're awake, " Shen Yuan whispered. "You'd never do something as low-IQ as falling asleep in a stranger's home. I wouldn't like you if you did."

With his eyes closed, he had no idea what kind of expression was on Shen Yuan's face.

"PIDW, I mean your world, it seriously sucks. But it has you in it, so I bother reading about it."

That...

"You're still not getting up? So either you seriously are asleep, or you really want to know what I would do, right? Then don't blame me, I have no choice but to do it."

Binghe had enough control of himself to keep his body from tensing when he felt Shen Yuan reach out. He waited, and waited, until a hand was placed gently on the top of his head.

The hand was still for a moment before it began stroking Binghe's hair.

When Binghe was a child, his mother had once paid their neighbour to watch after him for a week while she did an odd job in the next town over. For the short amount of time he was under the other lady's care, she was cruel to him, insisting he was dirty no matter what he did. She'd scrub soap into his scalp and until it felt raw and painful, only to complain afterwards about how unmanageable his hair was.

Luo Binghe had long forgotten that memory until now, when he considered the lovely way Shen Yuan ran his fingers through his locks. The man pet his head like he was a prized and beloved housecat, sometimes scraping his nails against spots that made it difficult for even someone like Luo Binghe to stay silent. Whenever he'd be stopped by a knot, his fingers would gently loosen the tangle until he could continue again.

When Shen Yuan pulled his hand away, Luo Binghe actually felt… disappointment.

The door to Shen Yuan's bedroom creaked open again.

"If you really are asleep… goodnight, Luo Binghe."

When the door closed, Binghe opened his eyes again.

He wasn't sure what all of that meant.

Shen Yuan handed him a new device. "It's the latest console from Nintendo." He sat next to Binghe on the couch, tucking his legs into his chest as he tapped on an identical screen. "I need someone to trade with on Animal Crossing and you're here everyday, so…"

Luo Binghe watched his character run around the screen. "This thing is supposed to be me?"

"Come on, let me come over already!" Shen Yuan whined. "I've already added us as friends."

The comment made him pause.

Friends?

Did Luo Binghe have friends?

Ning Yingying was his friend once, when they were young. She made trouble for him, and he needed her to save him from their shizun, but they always had each other's backs.

Then they got married, and their friendship became strained. By the time he brought home his tenth wife, Yinying was no longer his airheaded shijie dragging him into her shenanigans. As the first wife, she had to set a respectful example. Or maybe that was just an excuse, and she felt as strange around him as he did around her.

"I…" Binghe whispered, "I'll be back later."

"Huh?" Shen Yuan looked up from his game. "You have to go right now?"

When Luo Binghe was a young man, he took hold of Xin Mo to escape the Endless Abyss. Since then, there hadn't been a day of peace in his life- until this moment, in this world where Xin Mo was subdued. His mind felt clear for the first time in centuries, and more than anything, he wanted to see his *friend.*

Shen Yuan called out to him, but Binghe opened a vortex and jumped through. The second his foot touched the luxurious tiles lining his palace, Xin Mo was screaming inside his skill again, shaking with demonic energy demanding blood. He ignored it and soldiered on until he was throwing open the first wife's bedroom door.

Ning Yingying jumped, dropping the book in her hand. "A-Luo?"

Before he could say anything, she was already rushing across the room towards him.

“What’s wrong?” Yingying demanded. “Was it a pollen?” Luo Binghe shook his head, and her brows furrowed in confusion. Like she couldn’t imagine any other reason Binghe would want to see her.“A-Luo?”

Binghe took a deep breath. “This…”

This lord-

This husband-

“This shidi wanted to see his Ning-shijie.”

Her mouth dropped open in shock. She recovered quickly, taking his face into her hands. “What happened?” Ning Yingying eyed him for injuries. “Did someone hurt you?”

Suddenly feeling shy, he mumbled, “can’t I just spend time with my friend?”

Ning Yingying was elated.

They talked for hours. Ning Yingying told him she’d been keeping Liu Mingyan and Sha Hualing company while he was gone. Luo Binghe told her there was an entire world without cultivation, where humans prospered with man made inventions instead. “There is a website shiz- Shen Yuan uses to instantly send letters across the world.”

“Were- were you about to say ‘shizun’ just now?”

Binghe cleared his throat. “It’s just a joke. He teaches me so much about his world, so…”

Ning Yingying’s eyes shone in a way that had Binghe on edge. “Then you should show you appreciate your teacher, A-Luo!”

Luo Binghe returned to Shen Yuan some time later. His… shizun was right where he’d left him. “Binghe?”

Shen Yuan’s clock showed an hour had passed since he left. He must have spent seven hours in his world, then.

“This lord hopes his sudden departure was not too stressful for Shen Yuan.” Binghe handed him the gift Ning Yingying had insisted on buying. “One gift begets another. If you will be my shizun for the time being, you should look like it.”

Shen Yuan opened the fan, hiding his face behind golden embroidery. Even if his smile wasn’t visible, the joy in his eyes was clear.

“Why does this fanfic say not to eat birds?”

Shen Yuan tore his eyes away from the TV and gaped at the demon. “You’re still reading those?”

“They are informative.” Binghe shrugged.

It was incredible seeing strangers’ feelings regarding him written so clearly. What they wanted for him, how they thought of him, how they viewed his relationships with others… Who wouldn’t want to read how they were interpreted by the world?

“You should get off those sites before you see something that will make you mad,” Shen Yuan warned warily.

“...like what?”

“You really don’t want to know.”

“Either you tell me, or this lord will find out on his own.”

"Well, some people…" Shen Yuan squeezed his eyes shut, as if preparing himself for the imminent killing blow. "Some people write romantic stories of you with Shen Qingqiu!"

"Oh," Binghe commented idly. "How come?"

“How come?” Shen Yuan repeated. “That’s all you have to say!?”

Luo Binghe had a *lot* to say about Shen Qingqiu. He could stand there all day and seethe over Shen Qingqiu and how he’d happily beaten and starved a child for no reason at all. He could go on endlessly about how cruel and unjust it was that Luo Binghe would never get those years back, how a childhood was something he’d never had because of the *selfishness of one man-*

Luo Binghe took a calming breath. But that was before he’d met that *other* Shen Qingqiu. The one who patted his head, and held him in his arms to transfer qi, and allowed his student into his bed.

His feelings for his scummy old shizun were complicated, so he left them to sort out later.

“I can’t say I’m not curious,” he answered instead. “There must be a reason these people think Shen Qingqiu could… love me.”

Something indescribable passed over Shen Yuan’s face. “...okay. I’ll leave you to it.”

Luo Binghe returned to his room with Shen Yuan’s laptop, and he searched for love stories of the bastard who’d ruined his life.

Luo Binghe/Shen Qingqiu, pining, 2.3k

Shen Qingqiu has a problem- he's madly in love with his student. And no matter how hard he tries to push Luo Binghe away, the boy always returns to him.

Binghe raised a brow at the summary. His shizun certainly did *not* keep away from him. He went out of his way to scrutinize every little thing Binghe did for the sake of punishing him, then spent hours gleefully watching Ming Fan beat him. He scrolled down.

Luo Binghe/Shen Qingqiu, omegaverse, father-son, 7k.

Eleven years ago, Shen Qingqiu sent his child down the Luo River… today, a student named Luo Binghe joins the peak, and Shen Qingqiu can feel an immediate bond. But is it only one of a father and son?

…

Binghe was honestly speechless. For his own mental stability, he decided to pretend he hadn't just seen that.

Binghe searched for hours, reading through the worst prompts imaginable. Truly ‘man-made horrors beyond human comprehension’, as Shen Yuan liked to say. It was night by the time he found something that caught his eye.

Luo Binghe/Reader, Luo Binghe/Shen Qingqiu, transmigration au, 50k.

What if it was possible to give Luo Binghe a better life? What if he got the chance to grow up with a shizun who cared about him? You’re determined to protect the future demon lord!

…now this was interesting.

“Are there no more fanfics of Shen Qingqiu falling in love with me?”

“I said ‘the weather’s nice today’ and you responded with that.”

Luo Binghe rolled his eyes. “Tell me where to find more of these.”

Shen Yuan abandoned his task of stirring ungodly amounts of sugar into his tea. “You read *all* of them? In one night?”

Binghe stared at the laptop screen. “I have to know why.”

“Why?” Shen Yuan repeated. “Why what?”

“Why Shen Qingqiu likes me in these stories.” Binghe held the laptop in his hands as he paced around the room. “This Luo Binghe behaves the same way I did as a child, but these versions of Shen Qingqiu fall at his feet. Why not mine?”

“Luo Binghe… I think you should stop reading those.” Shen Yuan pushed the teacup away. ”Aren’t you just letting him control you beyond the grave like this? He’s gone. You should

forget about him and live a happy life."

"He could have-"

"Binghe, these were written by people who have never even been to your world! There is no way the Shen Qingqiu you knew would behave that way."

"No."

Shen Yuan blinked. "No?"

"He could. He can act that way." Something bitter crawled inside him. "He does."

Shen Yuan waited quietly. Luo Binghe didn't elaborate.

"Those stories weren't written by Shen Qingqiu," Shen Yuan said softly. "They were written by ordinary humans. Most people are good, so they want good things for you. Shen Qingqiu was not good, so he didn't. That's all there is-"

Angry qi burst from Binghe's body involuntarily, cracking the laptop's screen. "Don't you dare," Binghe snarled, "tell me *that's all there is to it* ."

Shen Yuan fell silent.

Another version of him found a second home at Cang Qiong instead of a nightmare. Another version of him had received love instead of torture while he grieved his mother. It was a life that had been possible, but was never given to *him* out of fate's fickle whims. Did he not deserve this much, at the very least? Could he not even know *why* he'd had to suffer?

"I will find Shen Qingqiu again," Luo Binghe muttered. "And I will find out what it was that made me different."

Shen Yuan watched him quietly with concern before he said, "will you tell me about it when you find what you're looking for?"

Like hell he would lose a chance to rub in Shen Yuan's smug face that he was wrong! "Of course I will!"

"Okay." Shen Yuan's concerned expression melted into something pleasant once again. "If anyone can find a reason, it would be you."

"That's right!" Binghe raged. "Underestimating this lord is a fatal mistake."

"Mhm." Shen Yuan smiled encouragingly. "Good luck."

"This lord does not need *luck,"* Luo Binghe spat out as he created a new portal back to his world.

Back in his own world, Xin Mo came to life, thrumming with power again. Stalking down the palace hallway, he entered the royal court. "Sha Hualing!" Binghe barked. "I want beasts

to cull, *now!”*

Hualing worked fast. In less than five minutes, Luo Binghe was venting his fury by slashing apart the most vicious creatures this land had to offer, captured and let loose in the palace garden.

Someone cleared their throat loudly. Soaked in blood, Binghe turned to find Ning Yingying. “What!?”

“May I ask what has A-Luo so…” She watched him rip the head off a Black Moon Rhinoceros Python with his bare hands. “...upset.”

“That damned Shen Yuan! He said Shen Qingqiu had no justification for his treatment of me!”

Ning Yingying stared at him. “...how truly despicable.”

Binghe’s rage grew. “Then he said I should just… just *forget* about Shen Qingqiu and live happily!”

“What a sicko,” Yingying commented dryly.

“If that wasn’t enough,” Binghe yelled as he cut down another monster, “he wished me good luck! And said if anyone could find a reason for Shen Qingqiu’s behaviour, it would be me!”

Yingying couldn’t take it anymore. “A-Luo,” she said gently. “Just what part are you angry about?”

“What part? What part!?” Binghe screeched. “How dare he say… it’s… the *disrespect* of…” Ning Yingying continued to stare at him. Humiliation washed over Luo Binghe as he struggled for something to hate Shen Yuan for, and found nothing. “Go away! Shut up! Ning Yingying forgets her place!”

“Okay, *Lord Luo.”* His first wife smirked as she walked away. “But this lowly wife sure would like to meet the man who has affected the emperor so much…”

“Binghe, come to the bathroom!”

Luo Binghe shuffled over, curious to see what his shizun could teach him *there.*

"These are contact lenses," Shen Yuan explained. A small, clear disk was balanced on the tip of Shen Yuan's finger. Binghe watched in interest as the man pressed it right into his eye and blinked rapidly, then repeated the process for the other side. "You can't sleep in them or wear them too long, but they can temporarily replace glasses."

With both 'contact lenses' inserted, Shen Yuan looked back at Binghe with… *beautiful* amber eyes. His lashes fanned out into a natural cat eye shape, making his eyes look even sharper. Binghe hadn't realized how much the thick spectacles had hidden them. He'd never bothered to take a good look before.

With the demonstration finished, he chased Binghe out of the bathroom. He emerged half an hour later, tapping a small sponge against his face. Luo Binghe couldn't believe what he was seeing.

Shen Yuan looked gorgeous. His pallid skin had transformed into an eye-catching porcelain, his hair slicked back just perfectly to frame his face handsomely. His usually bitten and lifeless lips were glossed and slightly pink, just inviting someone to chew on them.

…why did he think that? Who chewed on lips? That would feel awful.

…not that he had any intention of pleasuring Shen Yuan anyway!

"Shizun looks different," he simply stated.

"That's the power of makeup." Shen Yuan brushed some light pink powder onto his cheeks, making his usually bloodless face look more *alive* . Binghe was transfixed as he followed his teacher into his bedroom. The compact blush snapped close in shizun's hand with a click, and he tossed it onto his bed without a care. "Men don't usually wear makeup in this world, but as long as you keep it natural enough, most people don't really notice."

Shen Yuan opened his closet, pulling out a blue suit, leather shoes, and several accessories, all of which he promptly put on. The thick fabric of his outerwear gave him the illusion of broader shoulders.

"Meimei says shoulder pads are the men's version of stuffing your bra…" He tied his laces. "She's such a weird kid."

If Luo Binghe hadn't watched this transformation from beginning to end, he would never have believed this was the same person he saw everyday. When Shen Yuan moved towards the door, Binghe cried out in alarm, "where are you going?"

Shen Yuan fastened a thick bracelet- a ' *watch'* - onto his slender wrist. "Gotta earn my rent for the next half year."

Anger bubbled in Binghe's chest and he'd appeared between Shen Yuan and the door in a second. Roughly grabbing his host's forearm, he demanded, "And what sort of work does Shen Yuan do that requires him to wear powder and rouge at night?"

"What?" Shizun narrowed his eyes. "What are you thinking? I'm just meeting some of my parents' investors."

The short man winced when Binghe's grip tightened. "This one wasn't aware shizun's parents ran a brothel."

Shen Yuan gaped at him, then exhaled wistfully. "Haven't even left the house, and I've already been called a whore. It's gonna be a great night." Shizun's phone chimed, and he swiftly made his way around the demon blocking his path. "My ride's here. I'll be back in a few hours."

The door closed on Binghe's face.

Luo Binghe was perfectly fine with sitting in Shen Yuan's apartment alone. While Shen Yuan was dressed up to meet other people. Without him.

Shen Yuan's laptop still had to be fixed, and his computer was completely destroyed, both due to Luo Binghe. The books lining Shen Yuan's shelves were either in another language or full of strange slang. He picked up his gaming console and opened *Animal Crossing.* The little creature that represented him had a letter waiting in his mailbox.

Binghe,

Your town has oranges, so here's a cherry. Plant them into the ground and you'll get a cherry tree! Then you can sell them at the store, or give them to the other residents. Come over if you need any more. :)

-Shizun

Binghe abandoned the game immediately and ran out the door. With his speed it only took minutes to reach Shen Yuan's destination.

The building housed a massive hall on the second floor, lit up in gold by a luxurious crystal chandelier. Binghe could see inside from the glass walls. Tables were piled with food, and waiters walked around with trays of wine and snacks. Every guest was wearing fine fabrics and shining jewels.

…Shen Yuan may not have been as simple a man as he made himself out to be.

Binghe found his shizun quickly. Shen Yuan was relaxed, smiling and surrounded by a handful of similarly dressed men, smirking as he whispered things that set them off into laughter.

Of course, it wouldn't be his shizun if he wasn't two-faced. Binghe watched time and time again as Shen Yuan orchestrated distractions and misdirections. Gesturing to a guest's shining ring, and emptying his wine glass as soon as the group's attention was off him. Pretending to laugh when he was really shaking his head to survey the room.

Binghe truly had a new respect for Shen Yuan when someone praised his high alcohol tolerance- though the man hadn't taken a sip all night.

Despite his acting, Binghe could see the fatigue settling in. Every minute left Shen Yuan's eyes a little duller, his movements a little slower. It didn't take long before he was excusing himself from the group.

Binghe trailed after him from outside, watching him stray further from the festivities. He reached a glass door, and exited the building onto a balcony.

Shen Yuan walked to the end, placing his drink on the railing. In an instant, his confident posture melted away, leaving behind a frail man holding onto the stone structure for support. He sighed, and inhaled slowly. Then he reached into his trouser pocket, and pulled out Binghe's fan. After just a few seconds of fanning wind into his face, Shen Yuan looked delighted. Luo Binghe also couldn't help but feel a bit pleased.

"Yuan-ge!" A child ran out of the building as well, throwing himself at Shen Yuan's legs. "Yuan-ge, Yuan-ge, Yuan-ge!"

"What's all this commotion?" Shen Yuan smacked the fan against the boy's head lightly with the fan before he pocketed it again. "I don't have anything for you, you know."

"Nothing?"

Shen Yuan took a sip from his glass, then placed it back on the top rail. Pushing the drink towards the child, he said, "want to try your first sip of champagne?"

The boy crossed his arms with a huff. "I'm not falling for that."

"If you don't want to-"

The kid hurriedly grabbed the drink and swallowed down half of it in one go. "You tricked me again!" He scowled up at Shen Yuan, who was clearly struggling not to laugh. "It's just apple juice!"

Shen Yuan took the glass out of the boy's hands, swirling it and sniffing it like it was a fine wine before taking a cautious sip. "Hmm, a subtle hint of apples." He shrugged haughtily. "But I guess a tiny little baby who doesn't know anything about alcohol would think it's just apple juice!"

"I'm not a baby!" The child insisted. "I-I, I was just testing *you!* I'm already feeling super drunk right now!"

Luo Binghe felt his own lip twitch up. Shen Yuan, on the other hand, was laughing uncontrollably.

Binghe had seen him laugh plenty of times, whether it was stifled giggles when Binghe fumble with technology, or sarcastic snorting during dramas he insisted on hate-watching. He'd never seen him like this, trying to cover his wide grin with a hand, his eyes closed into happy crescents. "Already- already drunk- pfft- hahaha!"

"Shut up!" The boy wailed. "You suck!"

“Wen Yong,” a third voice hissed. “Leave him alone.”

The boy shrunk into himself, hiding behind Shen Yuan as another man arrived. Shen Yuan stroked the child’s head, and Wen Yong sprang up again. “He doesn’t need to go right this minute, does he?”

Shen Yuan’s new acquaintance wore a gaudy red blazer. He scowled down at the kid. “Leave, now.”

“We’ll do something fun next time, okay?” Shen Yuan promised Wen Yong. The boy nodded sadly, shot a hateful glower at the man interrupting them, and ran off. Shen Yuan crossed his arms. “Be nicer to your brother.”

"He talks too much," the older Wen groused.

"That's what children do. But I’m glad you’re here.” Shen Yuan opened his blazer and handed over an envelope. “I need some documents.”

Wen opened the envelope and frowned at the contents. “Get a picture without photoshop. There’s no point in an ID that doesn’t look like him.”

Shen Yuan sighed. “No, he’s really just that ridiculously pretty.” Shizun stretched his arms out towards the sky, groaning and deflating as they came back down. “I think I’m gonna call it a night. Can you tell my dad Chun Bo agreed to the deal?”

“...sure.” He hid the envelope into his own coat. “But just so you know, everyone is looking for you.”

“I couldn’t stay even if I wanted to.” There, Shen Yuan made his first and only mistake of the night: "I have someone waiting for me at home."

Shen Yuan froze up right as the words left his mouth. The other man present grabbed his hand. “Shen Yuan! What do you mean by that!?”

“Wen Guo, calm down!” When he was reluctantly released, Shen Yuan pulled his hand back. “I just… got a goldfish.”

Wen Guo’s shoulders relaxed. “Good.”

“What is your problem?” Shen Yuan questioned. Wen Guo turned around and walked away without another word, his face red in shame at his own outburst. “Hey!” Shen Yuan called after him, “why are you angry!?”

Binghe couldn’t believe his eyes. There was no way someone this oblivious could really exist, was there?

Shen Yuan sneaked away from the gathering area, cheerfully giving his goodbye to anyone he happened to bump into on the way. Finally, he exited from the hall’s main doors, walking towards the gardens. When he found a wooden bench in front of the carved fountain, he all but collapsed onto it.

What a pathetic state he was in. Such a weak man claimed to be his shizun? This *child?* Shen Yuan was barely a tenth of his age!

Luo Binghe loomed over the fragile body spread out over the bench. Shen Yuan opened his eyes, and gasped softly. “Binghe! Did you come all this way to ask me something? I really need to get you a phone.”

He didn’t look the least bit surprised to see him. “Are you not going to ask how I found you?”

“Well, the blood parasites, right?”

Binghe stared at the man.

Shen Yuan stared back, completely unaffected. “You put your blood in my food, didn’t you?”

“You… knew? And you still ate it?”

“Well, yeah, I’m not going to turn down your food.”

A surge of anger lit up in Luo Binghe. Since the day they’d first met, Shen Yuan had been impossible to understand. Giving him a place to stay, showering him in gifts like they were friends, encouraging him, all the while asking nothing in return.

Being hated, or feared, or lusted after, Binghe could handle. *This* he didn’t know what to do with.

"My blood parasites are capable of consuming your bones," Binghe hissed threateningly. "They can stop your heart, eat you from the inside out, and make your body implode. You should be scared, *shizun."*

Shen Yuan just smirked. "That's hardly special, my sister's cooking can do all that too. Am I right?" At Binghe's unimpressed death glare, he glanced away. "Tough crowd."

Shen Yuan laid on the bench, surrounded by a well trimmed garden and bathed in moonlight, looking more handsome than Binghe would have thought possible. If it were anyone else, he would have found the scene beautiful, but…

The powder was creased under shizun’s eyebags, and lines exposed the grey skin underneath. The sight irritated Binghe terribly, and he was rubbing at Shen Yuan's face before he could stop himself.

Shen Yuan futilely tried to push Binghe away. "Ow-what!? What are you doing!"

Luo Binghe practically straddled the small man in order to smear the makeup. "Take it off!" He demanded.

“Binghe!” Shen Yuan clutched Binghe’s hands. “Stop, that *hurts-”*

"You primp and prime for those *men,* exhausting yourself to this point…! ″ Binghe spat, "Don't waste your time on them when you're supposed to be teaching *me!"*

Shen Yuan gawked at him. The fountain's rushing water was the only thing they could hear while they gazed at each other. Finally, Shen Yuan hesitantly said, "Luo Binghe, are you… jealous?"

Jealous? *Jealous?* Of course not! If Binghe was *jealous* he wouldn't secretly follow Shen Yuan to his party and fume because he saw *his shizun* smiling at others!

Luo Binghe growled and returned to pawing at Shen Yuan's face. "I told you to take it off!"

"Okay, okay, I will! Just stop!"

Shen Yuan sat upright on the seat, with Binghe next to him. In a low voice, Luo Binghe mumbled, "most people are *proud* to know this lord instead of *hiding* him."

"What? When…" Shen Yuan trailed off. "I… I'm sorry I said you were a goldfish."

Luo Binghe crossed his arms and huffed.

"Won't you even let me apologize?"

Binghe reluctantly turned back towards Shen Yuan. His terrible shizun! Shen Yuan looked far too amused by the whole thing! Binghe jumped off the bench and stormed off.

"Hey, wait! I'm sorry, okay?" Shen Yuan followed after him and grabbed his hand, stopping Binghe's halfhearted tantrum. "Come on, let's go home."

"Fine," Binghe mumbled. He squeezed shizun's hand, and pulled him closer. Shen Yuan allowed him to, until they were only inches apart.

Shen Yuan… really was too captivating like this. Binghe's free hand cupped Shen Yuan's face and leaned closer. Those enchanting brown eyes were focused solely back at him. "Binghe?"

Footsteps approached, and the moment was interrupted by a man wearing a black suit. "A-Yuan," he breathed out in shock.

Shen Yuan immediately blanched, letting go of Binghe and stepping back. "This- I swear, this isn't what it looks like."

Binghe looked between the two men, one speaking to his shizun *with far too much familiarity,* and Shen Yuan's fear (disgust?) at being found touching him. Purely out of spite, he slipped an arm around Yuan's waist and pulled the short man flush against his body. Glaring at the stranger, he declared: "It's exactly what it looks like."

Almost simultaneously, Shen Yuan and the other man's jaws dropped open. Binghe smirked smugly.

"Is that so…" The stranger gave him an unexpected smile. Luo Binghe had met enough slimy backstabbers to know it was genuine. He waved at the two of them. "I'll talk to you tomorrow, A-Yuan. Text me when you get home."

"No, wait!" Shen Yuan reached out for the retreating stranger, but Luo Binghe held him in place. He looked up at Binghe with messy makeup and a face flushed from embarrassment. *Beautiful,* Binghe couldn't help but think. "Binghe, let me go!"

“No,” Binghe denied. “Shizun said we were going home.”

"Wha- Binghe!" Shen Yuan sputtered. "My brother's gonna tell our entire family what you just said!"

Binghe barely had time to feel relieved at the word *brother* before Shen Yuan’s next words sent him spiralling again:

“Do you want a bunch of old aunties showing up at my place demanding you marry me!?”

Did… did he…?

In that small moment of shock, Shen Yuan squirmed out of Binghe's grip and ran away. "Ge, wait!"

Binghe didn’t even register shizun leaving. He could only remain frozen, processing this new information. If Shen Yuan’s family demanded he take responsibility and marry him… then Binghe would have to say yes, right…?

“This lord will marry Shen Yuan!” Binghe blurted out for no one to hear.

Chapter 3: every broken step

Chapter Notes

> hi everyone, long time no see!! i just want to thank everyone whos left such sweet comments on my last chapater 🥺 you guys are seriously too wonderful. it was also a joy to see so many people talking about my fic on twitter!
>
> Edit: OH I JUST REALIZED U SHIULD HAVE PUT A TW!!!
>
> Warnings for noncon drug use, a little objectification, just bingge being emotionally constipated as usual

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The ground rippled under Luo Binghe's feet with every step across the void. Little stars dotted the pitch black darkness, each small light a memory.

With his demonic powers so muted, entering Shen Yuan's dream was not easy. He could not even control whose dream he'd fall into. All he could do now was trek the dream realm hoping to stumble into something useful.

A voice echoed from his right. "...pretty far from your workplace…"

Binghe recognized it as Shu Jing, Shen Yuan's neighbour- she'd seen Binghe come out of shizun's apartment and insisted on chatting him up. He ignored the sound and continued onward.

A young girl this time. "...could you do this…"

Binghe was just about to walk past it when a second voice bubbled up from the same direction. "...forgive me…"

Shizun.

Binghe ran towards the glowing sphere, grasping it firmly. It exploded around him, and the dark setting was instantly replaced with a small room. Shen Yuan couldn't have been older than fifteen- he was laying on a bed, wearing a flimsy blue robe. Thick wires were connected to his chest with stickers, trailing back to a large machine next to him. Someone was at his bedside.

"I hate you!" The little girl cried. "You ruined my birthday! I didn't even get to make my wish!"

Shen Yuan, on the verge of death, looked genuinely apologetic. "I'm sorry..."

She was relentless. "You always say that! You always say sorry, then you do it again!"

For a few moments, there was nothing but soft weeping. Shen Yuan's face was coloured in shame, but he couldn't think of anything to say. Binghe moved closer, studying the pair like a ghost.

"I was going to wish," she hiccuped, "wish for you to get okay." She buried her face into her hands. "You-you… you couldn't wait - *hic* - two more minutes!? - *hic* - They *just* brought out the cake and you had to do this *then* !"

Shen Yuan sniffled. "Oh, meimei…"

Binghe glanced at the small girl again. So that was Shen Yuan's sister…

"Then… can you wish for me next year?"

Shen Yuan's sister looked up. "Huh?"

"I know, I know, your brother is so greedy, stealing away your wishes twice in a row." Shen Yuan patted her head. "If you still want to wish for me… I'd be very happy."

"Fine…" The last of her tears were wiped away. With determination, she scolded, "But if I wish for you so much and you don't get better, I'll be really mad!"

Shen Yuan smiled indulgently. "We wouldn't want that."

The dream faded into sunlight as Luo Binghe opened his eyes. It wasn't the first time he'd invaded Shen Yuan's dream, but this memory left Binghe feeling guilty and voyeuristic.

What he'd seen didn't leave his thoughts while he cooked breakfast. Food, Binghe had learned, was the key to making Shen Yuan divulge anything. When Shen Yuan took his seat at the small dining table, Luo Binghe brought up the topic with immense subtlety: "What exactly is wrong with you, shizun?"

Shen Yuan, in his silk sleepwear, scowled back. "Good morning to you, too."

Binghe transferred some fresh pancakes onto Shen Yuan's plate. His roommate abandoned his phone in a second, sitting upright and eager to devour the meal. Luo Binghe smiled as he poured the tea- he didn't cook often, but when he did, shizun's expressions were a delight to see. "This lord simply wants to understand this world and its inhabitants."

"Well, I didn't get infected by a plant or poisoned, if that's what you're thinking." He dropped cubes of sugar into his cup as he hesitated, but continued nonetheless. "It's a handful of things, but mostly angina." Shen Yuan stirred his tea, much longer than any other morning. "Combined with asthma, and a shitty immune system, and… ah, small things join together to be a problem. It's not really just one specific illness…" His lip twitched into a grin for a second. "My er-ge says I have *'frail bitch disease* .' Our mom heard him say it once and she got *so mad* ."

Two older brothers and a younger sister, Luo Binghe noted. Going by the adoring smile on his face he added, *they all seem quite close.*

Once, Luo Binghe would have been envious of someone like Shen Yuan: born into a rich and loving family, never having to experience the world's cruelty. Now Binghe envied Shen Yuan's family, for getting to grow up with someone like him.

Binghe waited until Shen Yuan finished his breakfast, and broached the topic when his host was at his most amenable. “Shizun has been so generous to give me his home these past weeks,” he said earnestly. “The least this one can do is aid Shen Yuan’s recovery.”

“It doesn’t work like that in this world, Binghe. You can’t just go on some quest and find a cure for this.”

“Shizun misunderstands.” Binghe stood from his seat, rounding the small table until he was at Shen Yuan’s side. “You’re forgetting this lord is a heavenly demon.”

Shen Yuan’s face went through various expressions. Confusion, realization, shock, before settling on panic. “Uh.” He escaped his chair as well, moving away from the approaching man. “I told you, I’m not a woman.”

“Of what importance is gender when my benefactor has done so much for me?” Binghe insisted.

“Are you- don't joke about things like that.”

Binghe continued to inch closer. “Didn’t shizun say it himself when we first met? This lord repays kindness a thousandfold.”

With each step Luo Binghe took forward, Shen Yuan took one back. “There’s really no need! No need to pay me back! Just happy to have you here!”

“Shizun, don’t be silly.” He lunged towards Shen Yuan. The other man yelped and managed to flee a second before Binghe reached him.

“What are you doing!?” Shen Yuan cried.

Binghe stepped around the furniture and chased after him. “Stop running!”

“Binghe!” Shen Yuan cowered behind the piano. “You don’t like men! I mean, *I* don’t like men!”

The fact that his own sexuality came as an afterthought really made Binghe doubt that.

“Listen, you’re only acting like this because you haven’t seen your wives in so long!” Shen Yuan said. “Go home for a while, and come back when you’re feeling better.”

Binghe used his cultivation to move faster than shizun could track with his mortal eyes. By the time Shen Yuan even spotted him, he was already pushing shizun against the wall and pinning down his wrists. “Let me cure you!” Luo Binghe yelled.

“Go back home and see your wives!” Shen Yuan yelled back.

Shen Yuan struggled against Binghe’s hold, looking up at him with apprehensive eyes, like captured prey. Something in Binghe’s stomach fluttered under that vulnerable gaze, and he squeezed his grip on the small man. “Why are you being so difficult? Do you not want…”

He let himself trail off. *Do you not want to be cured?* Or was he going to say, *do you not want me?*

Shen Yuan winced. “Binghe, you're not acting like yourself,” he insisted. “Please, go back to your world.”

He couldn't win against Shen Yuan's earnest and concerned frown. “Fine.”

Luo Binghe stepped away, leaving shizun to rub at his tender wrists. He picked up Xin Mo from where it was slumped against the coat rack and opened a portal without another word.

Stomping down the halls of his palace, he made a beeline for the first wife’s bedroom. Shen Yuan's rejection had left him in an irritated mood, so he ignored every call for his attention. Ning Yingying was sitting in front of an easel when he arrived.

“A-Luo, you're back!” Her hair was mussed and she was still in her sleepwear, but was already working away at a painting. “How come you're not with your new teacher?”

Binghe took a seat on her bed. “Shizun kicked me out,” he admitted glumly.

She dropped her paintbrush in shock. “He kicked you out?” Ning Yingying repeated.

His wife was gaping at him like he'd just said something absurd. “What?”

“Nothing…” She averted her eyes, returning to her painting. “A frail and sick human kicked out the heavenly demon that is our emperor. Totally normal…”

The words sent his brain scrambling. Wait… who the hell did Shen Yuan think he was, ordering Luo Binghe around like this!?

“Shizun!” Binghe roared in rage. He opened another portal back, and left so quickly he didn’t see Ning Yingying’s grin.

“What was that?”

Shen Yuan looked up from his phone screen. “What was what?”

The sound rang out once more. “There it is again.”

“Do people not knock on doors in your world?” Shen Yuan asked exasperatedly.

They did. It was just that no one knocked on *Shen Yuan's* door. When shizun stretched out his legs, Binghe stood up first. “I'll get it.”

Luo Binghe opened the door to find the most beautiful girl he’d ever seen in his life.

She didn’t have an alluring figure like Binghe’s wives and her face still carried the last remnants of stubborn baby fat. Even the way she presented herself, from her overly colourful makeup to her childishly pastel clothes, didn’t entice at all. She looked like an abstract art piece come to life, painted with the sole purpose of attracting as much attention as possible.

She did, however, look nearly identical to Shen Yuan. Binghe couldn't look away.

The girl opened her mouth, and just like that, anything that could have been considered appealing about her disappeared. “Who the hell are *you?”*

Luo Binghe crossed his arms and glared back at her. “Is that what you say when you come to someone’s home? Who are *you?”*

Her jaw dropped. She glanced at the door number, confirmed she was at the right place, then answered, “I *live* here!”

What? Binghe had been staying here for nearly two months now and he'd never seen her before. Before he could call the girl’s bluff, Shen Yuan appeared. “Oh, meimei. Come in.”

She flipped her light brown hair over her shoulder and marched in. If Binghe was present in his state of mind, he would have been offended. But he’d blanked out the second Shen Yuan identified his sister.

Of course! He’d come to this world to find Shen Yuan… ’s sister! He wanted so desperately right then to wrap his arms around Shen Yuan… ’s sister. With his high cultivation, he could immediately distinguish her scent from her brother’s- while Yuan’s was homely and natural, hers was more cosmetic and luxurious. How comforting and wonderful it would be to go home everyday to a house smelling like Shen Yuan… ‘s sister.

But forget that! All that mattered was marrying Shen Yuan as quickly as possible and having lots of children together so shizun would never be able to leave him!

…uh, his sister…?

Someone tapped his shoulder. “Binghe?” Shen Yuan whispered. “Are you okay?”

“Mhm?” He quickly closed the door and went back inside. “Apologies for worrying shizun-”

Before he could say any more, Shen Yuan was dragged backwards by a powerful force. ”Ge, don’t stand so close to him!”

“Shen Mei…” Shizun said warily.

Shen Yuan's younger sister- *Shen Mei*- held onto him tightly, preventing her brother from returning to Binghe. "Who is this, and why is he in our house?"

"It's *my* house."

Shen Mei scowled. "You gave your extra bedroom to me!"

"Yes, I gave the *guest* bedroom to you when you *visited."* Shen Yuan exclaimed. He looked back at Binghe with a roll of his eyes as if to say, *'aren't younger sisters so silly?'*

She maintained her hold on Shen Yuan, but looked back at Binghe with a glare. "And he's your *guest* right now, is that it?"

"That's right," Binghe said petulantly. His eyes were locked onto where she was holding Shen Yuan's shirt with an iron grip, preventing him from moving towards Binghe. "I'm your brother's *dear guest,* so there's no space for you. Go away."

"Binghe," shizun admonished softly.

"Why are you letting him stay here?" The look she directed towards Binghe could only be described as venomous. "Don't be tricked by him just because he's a man, ge. Men can be dirty liars with other men too!"

Shen Yuan sputtered in shock. "This is not one of your BL dramas!"

She ignored him. "Look at that pretty-boy face," she whispered. "I bet he's a total man-slut."

"Shen Mei!" Shen Yuan cried in dismay. Binghe's eyes glowed red, and Shen Yuan stepped between the two of them. "Binghe, I'm so sorry for my sister. Please, don't be upset with her."

Before he could reply, she was already speaking again. " *This* is Binghe?" Shen Mei's face was disgusted. "The same guy who saw your beta blockers and thought that meant omegaverse was real?"

Two could play at that game! "And this must be your *meimei* who proposed to a drawing of Sasuke Uchiha."

Binghe didn't know who that was, but no matter. Judging by her expression, he'd *won.*

"What the fuck! Why do you know that!?"

"Shizun, your sister has *none* of your grace."

"'Shizun?' Ew, don't do your weird role-playing in front of me!"

"Enough!" Shen Yuan shouted.

Luo Binghe and Shen Mei were equally unused to Shen Yuan raising his voice it seemed, because they both closed their mouths in an instant.

“Both of you, sit *down!”*

The two of them sat down on the couch obediently.

Shen Yuan opened his gifted fan, waving a calming breeze for himself. “Any more squabbling and you're *both* going home. Understood?”

But Binghe hadn’t even done anything! He opened his mouth to argue, but Shen Yuan's angry eyes met his, and Binghe closed it again. He and Shen Mei nodded without a word.

Shizun exhaled deeply. “Now I'm going to make tea.” He gave the two of them a flat look. *“Behave.”*

They nodded again, staying obedient until Shen Yuan walked into the kitchen and out of earshot. The second they were alone, Shen Mei hissed, “get lost, freak!”

Binghe whispered back, “learn how to apply blush in moderation before you call someone else a freak!”

The girl clenched her fist. “You did *not!”*

Shen Yuan stuck his head back into the living room. “Do you guys want milk tea or green?”

Shen Mei smiled sweetly. “Milktea, please, ge!” When he nodded and returned to the kitchen, she was back to scowling at Binghe. “You don't live here.”

“On the contrary, I do.” Luo Binghe smirked and leaned back. “You can ask your brother. We are *very* close.”

Shen Mei's mouth dropped in horror. He didn't *lie,* Binghe could confidently say he was Shen Yuan's closest companion these last few weeks. No one else had accompanied him home yet… despite there being many attempts. (Luo Binghe didn't trust the delivery man who dragged on his conversations with shizun, not one bit.)

The girl took on a more thoughtful expression, studying Binghe's face. "He's not easy to take care of,” she said finally. "I'll kill you if you quit halfway."

Understanding dawned on Binghe, a grin stretching out across his face. "Is Shen Yuan's sister giving me her blessing?"

“ *No,* ” Shen Mei denied fiercely. “I’m telling you now, if you’re dating my brother for money, I’ll ruin your life! So whatever you’re after-”

"That's enough." Shen Yuan cut his sister off with a light smack to the back of her head. Guilt coloured her face instantly, but Luo Binghe felt no vindication winning against someone protecting Shen Yuan. His shizun placed a tray on the coffee table adjacent to the sofa and seated himself next to Binghe. "Binghe is richer than us. By a *lot."*

Caught between shame and doubt, she only muttered, “...how rich.”

"Royalty rich. Like, comically rich," Shen Yuan elaborated. "Scrooge McDuck diving into a pool of gold rich."

Shen Yuan insisted Binghe was so much richer, but refused to let himself be repaid for his kindness. How unfair.

“Shi-” Shen Mei shot him a look, and Binghe stopped himself. There was no cultivation in this world, so naturally no one had shizuns. Binghe cleared his throat. “Yuan-ge…”

Both Shens choked on their tea.

"Yuan-ge?" Shen Yuan bonked Binghe's head with the fan, a habit he'd taken up recently when he felt shy. "Aren't you older than me…"

Binghe was nearly two centuries older than him, but… it just made sense to refer to Shen Yuan as the elder, whether he said shizun, Yuan-ge or… mama?

No, no, what? Why did he think that? That was just weird.

But…

He thought of Shen Yuan teaching him the ways of the world like his shizun, lovingly comforting him like a mother…

"Binghe?"

The siblings watched him expectantly. Unwilling to give Shen Mei anything she could use against him, Binghe lied, “I was listening.”

"Um, okay." Shen Yuan acquiesced. "So what do you think?"

He went with the safest option: "I agree."

The girl raised an eyebrow. "You agree?"

"Is it so odd this- that I would have the same opinion?"

Shen Yuan's sister shot her brother a pointed look. Shen Yuan ignored it and said with concern, "We asked what you want for dessert."

"And you answered, 'I agree.'" His sister added. “Even though no one had said anything yet.”

“Stop trying to piss him off,” Shen Yuan hissed. In a more clear tone he told her, “Binghe has been studying very hard these last few months. It's natural if he's a bit tired.”

Oh, Shen Yuan. Sweet and lovely Shen Yuan, who seemed to care about Luo Binghe's image more than he did himself.

“Oh, he's a student,” Shen Mei said suspiciously. “What is he studying?”

“Anthropology,” Binghe matched evenly. “This world and its technology is so amazing, isn't it?”

Shen Mei didn't hesitate. “Cultural, Linguistic, Archeology, or Biological?”

“Since when the fuck do you know so much about anthropology,” Shen Yuan whispered. “You go to fashion school.”

“None of those,” Binghe said with a smile. He placed a hand on Shen Yuan's thigh, looking away from her enraged face and into shizun's wide eyes. He leaned closer and stated, “I only need to know what my darling laoshi teaches me.”

Shen Yuan's jaw dropped open at the same time Shen Mei began screeching for Binghe's head. Soon enough, shizun had recovered and focused his energy on soothing the girl.

Ever the gentle and doting brother. If Luo Binghe disliked Shen Mei before, envy made that feeling burn a hundred times hotter. Why did Shen Yuan show her so much love and care, just to keep Binghe at arm's length? It should be him getting headpats and attention!

He nearly celebrated when Shen Yuan said, “I don't think we have time for dessert. It'll be dark soon, go back to your dorm.”

“But-”

“No buts!” Shizun insisted. He held the entry way open for her. “I'm not getting lectured by mom for keeping you out late again.”

She huffed in exasperation. “You're really gonna let this weird guy stay here? You know how dangerous men are, right?”

“Meimei, a coughing baby could kill me, male or not.” The two of them shut their mouths awkwardly. “Sorry, that was…”

“Fine!” Shen Mei stomped through the door's frame and into the luxuriously carpeted hallway. "Do whatever you want!” She ran down the hall, and just before turning the corner, she yelled one last thing: “Just know I told you so when he ends up cuddling your corpse for five years!"

Shen Yuan watched her run away, baffled. "What the hell is that girl reading these days?"

Luo Binghe was studying this world's laws when the apartment's owner returned. “Oh, Binghe, you're here.”

Luo Binghe didn't look up from the screen. “Mhm.”

“Well, I won't disturb you. Have fun!” Shen Yuan slipped out of his shoes swiftly and walked past him. Binghe heard Shen Yuan's bedroom door close quickly.

Binghe closed the laptop. Shen Yuan had just returned home, and there were no gifts for him? No *‘I know you don't have these in your world, do you want to try?’* or *‘I saw this and thought you might like it’.* Not even any questions about what Binghe was doing! Something was afoot.

Binghe's ear twitched as it focused on the other side of the living room's wall. He could hear some sort of thick paper being ripped very slowly to prevent calling attention. Like packaging on a box being stripped away with aching care so no one would take notice of the sound.

Shen Yuan had brought something home, and it was something he didn't want Luo Binghe to see.

Binghe kicked shizun's door open. Shen Yuan was standing in the dark, as if he was too in a hurry to even turn on the lights. True to his suspicions, shizun scrambled to hold his hands behind his back. “Binghe, what are you doing!?”

Luo Binghe stepped closer. “What are you hiding, shizun?”

Shen Yuan's voice remained steady and strong, even if his pale face betrayed him. “I can want privacy in my own bedroom without hiding- no, *don't!”*

Binghe stepped around him, easily grabbing the item out of the man's hands. Shen Yuan staggered backwards, frightened.

“I knew it,” Luo Binghe whispered. “I knew there was something strange about you.” No one could be as unconditionally kind as Shen Yuan without having a dirty little secret, and what Shen Yuan was trying to hide was-

It was Luo Binghe.

“I swear it's not weird!” Shen Yuan cried. “It's not like I was going to sleep with it!”

The doll's fabric was made of soft felt, and its eyes were comically big. The robes it was wearing matched Binghe's outfit perfectly, and the red huadian sewn into its forehead made it abundantly clear who it was modelled after. The stuffed toy looked back at him with smug red eyes. “What the hell is this.”

Shizun mumbled something.

“Speak up!”

Shen Yuan's face was bright red, and he hung his head like he was being scolded for sneaking erotica home by his mother. His voice was awash with regret and shame when he repeated, “...limited edition Luo Binghe plushie… comes with redeemable code for Proud Immortal Demon Way extra chapter…”

Luo Binghe stared at him. “The only words I understood were my own name.”

It was so fast, no one other than Luo Binghe could have noticed it: Shen Yuan glanced towards his desk drawer. When he saw that Binghe had followed his gaze, he gasped. “Don’t open that!”

Obviously, Luo Binghe opened the drawer. And good gods, there were *so many* of him.

One figurine the size of his foot showed Luo Binghe in a pose, holding Xin Mo as demonic qi flowed around him. It was extremely detailed, and shadows painted across his chest drew attention to his bare pecs. Others were small and simple, like a rubber ball that had nothing but two pebbles for his eyes, a red heart on his forehead, and a plastic black ponytail for his hair. There were keychains, stickers, and novels with drawings of him on the cover.

“I see…” Binghe breathed out. Elation was growing in his chest, and it felt so thick and heavy, he felt it would asphyxiate him. He laughed, raking his eyes over the absurd amount of memorabilia. “So this is Shen Yuan's secret… absolute devotion to this lord.”

“It's not like that!” Shen Yuan whined behind him. “They were all on sale, first of all-”

Luo Binghe’s grin died when he saw white robes.

Unlike the rest of the merchandise, this was the only one without a huadian or a dark outfit. Binghe picked up the figure, holding it up to his eyes. Despite the dirt and bruises painted on him, the tiny replica of him looked back with bright and eager eyes. It even had a small Zhen Yang in its hand. “What is the point of this?”

Shizun paused his ramblings, and shuffled over to him. “Which one? You're holding it too high up.” Shen Yuan's hands held onto Luo Binghe's bicep for balance as he pushed himself onto his tip-toes. It must have been an adorable scene, but Binghe's attention was stolen solely by this younger version of himself. “Oh, that's you during your time at Qing Jing! One of my favourite figures.”

“You like this, do you?” Binghe’s chest heaved with rage. “You find it so amusing to see me helpless?”

“...Binghe-”

He couldn't remember the last time he'd been so enraged. So people in this world made little dolls of his suffering as a decoration. Those years had been the worst of his life, but Shen Yuan had no qualms with using his trauma for his own enjoyment! Luo Binghe growled and threw the figure to the ground, watching it split into several pieces.

Shen Yuan gasped. “Binghe!”

“What!?” Luo Binghe roared. His eyes burned red with killing intent. “You like it, do you? You favour the days when this lord was weak enough to abuse!?”

Shen Yuan didn't even notice Binghe's bloodlust. “Obviously not!” His roommate kneeled by the toy. “I meant I liked *you* back then.” He picked up the doll's breaken head and glared up

at Luo Binghe. “Back when you were sweet and nice, and not an asshole that destroys other people's stuff.”

How could that have been possible? All the other statues depicted Binghe at his strongest. Binghe heroically holding up his all-powerful sword, flexing his muscles, covered in the blood of his enemies. The one outlier was that innocent young man, with scratches all over his body. “And being so *sweet* and *nice* certainly did this lord many favours, didn't it?”

“Well yeah, it did. That's why Ning Yingying fell for you, remember?”

The adrenaline from Binghe's prior panic was slowly mellowing out, leaving him hyper aware of his pounding heart.

“Liu Mingyan too,” Shen Yuan continued. “If you'd refused to fight during Sha Hualing's demon invasion or lost, you never would have stolen Liu Mingyan's attention. She's your best wife, so clearly your righteous arc was working out for you.”

Binghe's eye twitched. What a naively optimistic way to look at things. During his time at Qing Jing, Luo Binghe had been a complete and utter fool. Too weak to stand up to Shen Qingqiu, too stupid to realize he was being used, and too asocial to garner aid from others. It was the period of time when he was completely useless and unloveable-

At that moment Luo Binghe realized he hated his younger self nearly as much as Shen Qingqiu had.

While Luo Binghe shook, Shen Yuan finished his inspection. “Oh good, nothing is broken.”

Binghe pushed away the daze, trying to think about anything other than his old master. He focused onto the pieces strewn across Shen Yuan's thighs. “Nothing broken? It’s completely torn apart.”

“It's a nendoroid.” Shen Yuan screwed a plastic hand back into the doll’s detached arm. “The pieces are supposed to come out.”

Shen Yuan popped the arm into the torso, and connected the disproportionately large head with the neck. With his delicate hands, Shen Yuan put that broken child back together easily. Binghe's heart throbbed painfully at the sight.

With the figure fully repaired, Shen Yuan held it against his chest protectively. “Will you try to break it again if I put it back?”

Luo Binghe didn’t have the emotional endurance to even look at it anymore, much less touch it. “Do what you want.”

Now that there was no point in hiding it, Shizun placed it beside his brand new computer monitor. Binghe watched Shen Yuan secretly pat the doll’s head, and bit his lip to keep it from wobbling pitifully.

“Come on.” Shen Yuan smiled at Binghe, that smile that was always so benevolent and warm and affectionate. “I said we'd try sushi today. Our reservation isn't until five, but it takes a

while to get downtown.”

Luo Binghe didn't say a word while the other man chattered on about their plans.

Why now? Binghe wondered. *Why didn't you fix that hated child when he needed it?*

*

With a swing of his jar, Luo Binghe caught a great amount of snow .

Many, many weeks ago, when shizun first urged Binghe to try ‘ice cream’, he'd been disappointed by Binghe's lack of excitement. “It's not nearly as sweet as the snow around the River of Sweet Dreams.”

Shen Yuan, ever the glutton, was saddened he'd never be able to taste something so delicious. That was when Luo Binghe offered to fetch the treat in a most filial manner.

Binghe and his shizun had recently begun watching TV shows together, and today the two of them were starting the second season of *One Punch Man* . Binghe was hopelessly endeared by the main character, a sweet older man who took a half-human as his disciple and allowed him to share his living space. In return, Shen Yuan insisted *Genos* was 'best boy', singing praises about how cool his powers were, and how cute it was that the student cleaned for and respected his teacher so much.

Take me to Shen Yuan, Binghe told Xin Mo. He stepped through the wormhole excitedly, a grin already on his face. Shen Yuan would probably whine that Binghe brought way too much of the snow back, just to eat it all in one day anyway!

“Shizun! I’ve returned!”

The vortex closed behind him, and Luo Binghe faced the beautiful man he’d been searching for. Standing in the bamboo house with him, Shen Qingqiu had Xiu Ya drawn to fight.

What kind of joke was this?

“Luo Binghe.” Shen Qingqiu’s piercing eyes were narrowed in distrust. “You have returned, but there is still nothing for this master to offer you here.”

Oddly enough, Luo Binghe agreed. He shook the notion away. He'd spent the last several months searching for this man, after all. By all means, he should have been seizing him and taking him back to his world as his newest conquest.

Then he thought of Shen Yuan waiting for him at home.

He just… he didn't have time for Shen Qingqiu now! The ice cream was melting! And he really wanted to finish his show…!

"This lord… will be back for you some other day," Binghe promised half-heartedly.

Shen Qingqiu's sword lowered barely an inch. Conflict was apparent on his face, clearly unsure if this was some trap. "What?"

"Can't kidnap you today," Binghe explained. He was already opening another portal. "Busy. Watching One Punch Man."

As Binghe stepped through the vortex, he could hear Shen Qingqiu screeching behind him. "YOU'RE WATCHING *WHAT!?"*

Take me to shizun, Binghe said to Xin Mo this time. His foot touched down on Shen Yuan's soft carpet. The ice cream was nearly a puddle, but it wouldn't be too late to save it if he put it in the freezer quickly! Binghe walked into the living room and stopped in place.

Shizun was talking to a woman. They were lingering by the door, like Shen Yuan was dragging on their farewell. She said something that set him off into laughter, and he playfully pushed her away and waved goodbye. By the time he closed the door and turned around to face Binghe, all that was left in the jar was a disgusting slush.

Shen Yuan’s heartbeat jumped slightly, but his face remained friendly. “Binghe, you’ll scare me to death one day,” he teased. “When did you get back?”

Luo Binghe's voice was icy and furious. “Who was that?”

“Uh, th-the housekeeper?” Shen Yuan blinked in surprise, thrown off by the sudden coldness around him. “She does the cleaning and meal prep.”

Binghe stared at the door she’d just passed through. “This lord has never seen her before.” His gaze returned to Shen Yuan. “Are you lying to me?”

“What?” Shen Yuan took a step back, confused. “Why would I lie about that? I just tell her to come when you go home so you won’t mind.”

Luo Binghe abandoned the container onto some shelf, and his anger rose until he was crowding the nervous man against the door’s frame. “You spend your time alone with her after you send me away?”

“I…” Shen Yuan asked helplessly, “are you angry about something?”

“Don’t let her come here again,” Binghe ordered.

“What?”

“Must this lord repeat himself? Don’t let her come here again!”

Something hot and ugly was taking over Luo Binghe’s good reasoning. Worst of all, he couldn’t even blame it on Xin Mo.

“Binghe, I need a housekeeper-”

“Is Shen Yuan not even capable of looking after himself!?”

The smallest flash of hurt passed Shen Yuan’s face, but Luo Binghe paid it no mind. He'd just had an epiphany, after all.

Of *course* Shen Yuan couldn't take care of himself. He was a spoiled young master who never worked a day in his life, and he was naive enough to let a stranger stay in his home. It was a miracle he'd survived this long!

That was why he needed Luo Binghe to take care of him. Thoroughly.

“Shizun, it’s time for dinner,” Binghe said suddenly.

Shen Yuan could never have expected such a sudden change in demeanour. “Huh?”

“What would shizun like to have for dinner?” Binghe rolled up his sleeves, mentally running through the fridges contents. He'd always believed it had filled itself, and with all this world's technological advances, that hadn't been such an absurd thought. Now that the housekeeper was gone, Binghe would be restocking it himself. “How about a nice homemade pizza?”

“Uh, huh?” Shen Yuan exhaled nervously as he watched Binghe walk to the kitchen with determination. “What are we doing?”

“Okay, pizza it is,” he decided. Binghe opened the flour bag. “Shizun, wait patiently for dinner.”

“I… alright?”

Shen Yuan turned his back towards him, and Binghe roughly took hold of his waist. “Where are you going!?”

The small man jumped in place. “You-you told me to wait!”

“Wait *here,”* Binghe demanded. He gestured towards the small table in the kitchen's corner.

Shen Yuan took a seat, perplexed. He was quickly made complacent when fresh scents began to waft towards him, leaving him waiting for dinner on the edge of his seat.

So cute.

As always, shizun made quick work of Binghe's cooking until all that remained was an empty plate and an overjoyed grin. He'd only glanced away to stack the dirty dishes into the sink when he noticed Shen Yuan was doing the unthinkable: putting on his shoes.

Binghe kicked the sneakers away. “Where are you trying to go now?”

Shen Yuan’s hands froze where they were reaching for his shoes. “Why did- I'm gonna catch some Pokemon while I work off this dinner?”

“No.”

“No?”

Luo Binghe grabbed Shen Yuan by the shoulders, turned him around, and pushed him back towards the sofa. “There is no need. Anything Shen Yuan needs, he may have this lord retrieve.”

“Binghe!” Shen Yuan fell onto the seat. “What-!”

“This Luo Binghe will capture as many pocky mons as shizun desires,” Binghe promised. “There's no need for you to go anywhere.”

Shen Yuan should stay in their home at all times, where he was properly looked after.

Luo Binghe got to work before shizun could fight back. He threw a soft blanket on top of Shen Yuan’s frame, handed him his gaming console, and fluffed the pillow behind him. “This lord will make tea for us. Isn’t this much better than going outside?”

“I- I guess?” Shen Yuan said. The demon forcefully pressed him into the cozy bundle, wrapping the blanket around him.

“Good boy, shizun,” Binghe praised, “I'm very glad you understand.” Shen Yuan’s thin face flushed red, but he was left too speechless to object.

They spent the rest of the evening together. Shen Yuan fiddled around on his game while Binghe pretended to study on the laptop. When the clock struck ten, Binghe was standing in front of Shen Yuan. “It's time for bed, shizun.”

Shizun ignored him, focused on his console. “Yeah, in a minute.”

Shen Yuan clearly had no intention of getting up anytime soon. Really, what would shizun do without him! Binghe slipped his arms under Shen Yuan’s back and knees, heaving the man up against his chest. Shen Yuan dropped his game and grabbed onto Binghe’s robe in surprise.

“Binghe! What are you doing!?”

“Bedtime is bedtime,” Binghe said with finality as he carried him to bed.

Holding Shen Yuan was such a delightful experience. He was just heavy enough to provide the most perfect pressure against him, and his skin was so soft and lovely to touch. Binghe closed his eyes, allowing himself to inhale Shen Yuan's natural scent. He never wanted to let go again.

“I don’t have a bedtime!” Shen Yuan squirmed in his arms. “I’m a grown man, put me down!”

“As you wish, shizun.” Luo Binghe gently placed Shen Yuan on the mattress, ignoring his indignant interjections.

“Binghe-”

“Be good, gege,” Binghe whispered. “Just do as I say.”

Shen Yuan blushed again. It was an alluring sight to see shizun sitting on the bed in his scandalously small shorts with pink cheeks. “I-I'm not tired...”

Yes, shizun usually went to sleep much later in the night- putting him in bed would just result in shizun staying awake on his phone.

It was a good thing Binghe had decided to ~~completely control and own~~- look after Shen Yuan. “It's okay. Just close your eyes.”

“Why? What are you going to-”

Binghe pressed a hand to Shen Yuan’s chest, keeping his palm and finger pads steady against shizun's shirt. Binghe’s technique pushed vast amounts of qi into the man, ordering his body to rest.

Luo Binghe grimaced. Shen Yuan’s body had no meridians to absorb the energy, so nearly all the qi dissipated at the top-most skin level. Useless.

“Not to worry, this lord will ensure shizun sound sleep.” Retrieving the Late Twilight's Slumber Seed from his pouch only took a second. “Open up, shizun~!”

“Wha-” Opening his mouth to question Binghe's actions was what doomed Shen Yuan in the end. He squealed in surprise when the small seed was shoved into his mouth.

Luo Binghe had to clamp his mouth shut with his hand. “Shizun, swallow.” Shen Yuan shook his head, trying to pry the hand off his mouth. Binghe sighed and pinched the man's nose as well. “Stop being difficult, shizun. Do as I tell you.”

Tears formed in Shen Yuan's eyes, absolutely *gorgeous* tears that made the demon side in Binghe purr in satisfaction. Shizun's heartbeat was only beginning to stress when he submitted. Shen Yuan's milky adam's apple bobbed so distractingly, Binghe forgot to remove his hand until shizun's eyes rolled back.

Finally asleep, he fell forward into Luo Binghe's arms. Binghe stroked Shen Yuan's face. He understood, of course. Of all the directions Shen Yuan could have fallen, he chose Binghe's arms! What a little seductress… But Luo Binghe was truly honourable, and allowed Shen Yuan his rest.

With shizun take care of for the night, Luo Binghe was done for the day. Truly, he had not allowed Shen Yuan to so much as lift a finger! He would never have use for anyone else now! Binghe walked towards his own bedroom and paused. Something inside him screamed to not leave shizun. So he plopped down next to the bed and watched Shen Yuan's sleeping face with intense focus.

What if Shen Yuan kicked off his sheets, and was cold through the night? What if he had to get up for water? What if he had a nightmare and needed Binghe to gently wake him up with

a kiss and reassure him everything was okay??? Clearly, Luo Binghe needed to remain diligent and stay by his side.

After fourteen minutes, Shen Yuan turned to his side, facing Binghe. Twenty minutes after that, he started drooling. Binghe wiped it away, but it honestly looked really cute!

“Don't let anyone else see you this way.” Binghe whispered to the unconscious man. “Promise, shizun. You can't let anyone into your bed other than… don't allow anyone into your bed.”

Around the two hour mark, shizun revealed he talked in his sleep, just a little bit.

“Ungh… Binghe…”

Binghe gasped, heat taking over his face. Shizun was dreaming about him! “What is it, shizun? What are you trying to tell me?”

“Yes… I got her…” Shen Yuan had a small smile on his face. “Finally… pulled Fu Hua…”

“Who's Fu Hua!?” Binghe shook Shen Yuan. “What do you mean you got her? Is she your lover!? You're not allowed to have one!”

Unfortunately, he'd put Shen Yuan to sleep himself, and the man wouldn't open his eyes no matter what. Binghe listened to him whisper some more nonsense before returning to silence.

Little after four in the morning, Shen Yuan shrugged off his blanket like Luo Binghe had predicted. He smiled and tucked shizun in again, letting his touch linger against the man's soft skin.

Right when dawn broke, Shen Yuan woke up and stifled a scream when he saw Binghe looming over his bed. Binghe smiled. “Good morning, shizun!”

Shen Yuan's breathing was heavy as he sat up, looking around in panic. “What- when did- did you fucking *drug* me!?”

He ignored the accusation. “No need to get up.” Binghe pushed him back down. “This disciple will bring breakfast to you, shizun!”

Shen Yuan's gaping was understandable. This was the first time Luo Binghe cooked two meals in a row.

“Again?” Shen Yuan asked in disbelief.

“Yes, again!” Binghe singsonged. “Shizun just needs to stay right here!”

He’d just finished pouring the tea when his keen hearing picked up shizun's voice. Followed by a much quieter one. Hm. With a tray in one hand, he dashed into Shen Yuan's room.

“No, he was fine before he- ah!”

Binghe held the phone away from Shen Yuan, who was reaching for it on the bed. “Who is shizun talking to?”

The squeaky voice from the smartphone answered, *“oh, shit!”*

Binghe pressed the phone against his ear. “Who is this?”

He was met with beeping signifying the caller had ended the line. The name ‘Airplane’ was shown on the screen.

“He hung up.” Binghe tossed the phone across the room, and it landed on Shen Yuan's computer chair, far from the bed. “Your friend is so rude, shizun. Don't talk to him anymore.”

“Binghe-”

“Breakfast is finished, shizun!” Binghe interrupted cheerfully. He placed the tray on Shen Yuan's lap. A steaming cup of milk tea, a bowl of fresh fruits dipped in chocolate, crepes topped with fluffy whipped cream, the list went on! Whatever Shen Yuan was going to say died in his throat, enraptured by the feast in front of him. He picked up a vanilla glazed donut, inhaling sharply after biting into it. Was there anything more satisfying than serving feeding his shizun?

“I… I'm not really-”

“Eat,” Binghe said firmly.

Shen Yuan sipped his tea before glancing towards him. “Aren’t you going to eat?”

“This lord has no need for food,” Binghe reminded him.

Shizun pushed the tray forward. “At least have a little,” Shen Yuan said shyly. “It’s awkward eating alone…”

Binghe's face hurt from smiling so much. Of course shizun would fuss over him! He leaned forward and opened his mouth expectantly.

Shen Yuan waited, then flushed red. “Binghe! I'm not feeding you!”

Binghe placed his hand over Shen Yuan’s and guided the man until he picked up a chocolate covered strawberry. Shen Yuan's heart was pounding erratically when Binghe brought shizun’s fingers against his lips and ate the fruit out of his hand. Once he was finished, he licked shizun's fingers clean and released him. “See, shizun?” He leaned back. “It wasn't so bad, was it?”

Shizun was completely frozen still, more flustered than Binghe had ever seen him. “I…” Shen Yuan's voice was hoarse. “I need to take a shower.”

He tried to push the tray away and flee, but Binghe refused to allow that. “Shizun, what about breakfast?”

“You have it.” Shen Yuan's eye darted to his private bathroom. “Or- just put it in the fridge! Let me get up!”

“No.” Binghe kept the food firmly on Shen Yuan’s lap. “It's best served fresh, shizun. At least have the crepes.”

Shen Yuan stopped struggling and stared at him. “Did you drug the crepes?”

Binghe was incredibly offended. “Shizun, I worked so hard on breakfast! How can you ask that?”

“...you're not answering my question.”

Binghe fidgeted under Shen Yuan's cold gaze. “This lord may have added some additional herbs from his world…”

Shizun finally shoved the tray onto the nightstand and leapt out of bed. “Will I at least be able to use the washroom without you insisting on joining in!?”

The words struck Luo Binghe like lightning. “Shizun is right,” he said in a daze. “What kind of unfilial disciple would I be if I didn't help shizun with his bath?”

Shen Yuan paled, and turned to make a run for the bathroom. Binghe caught him in a second. “Let go! I can shower on my own!”

“I'm sure that's true,” Binghe whispered into Shen Yuan’s ear. “But please shizun, allow this one to aid you.”

Luo Binghe gripped Shen Yuan’s shirt and swiftly pulled it off over his head.

Shizun held his arms over his bare chest, his thin face in shambles. “What the actual fuck is wrong with you, Luo Binghe!?”

Binghe held the fabric, eying the exposed skin. “Is shizun angry?”

“No shit I'm angry!” It didn't even take a full day of ‘caretaking’ before shizun snapped. “That's it!” Shen Yuan cried. “I can't take it anymore! Get out!”

“Shizun, don't stress,” Luo Binghe coaxed. “If shizun really needs some time by himself, Binghe will let shizun bathe on his own… for a few minutes.”

Shen Yuan shook his head. “I'm telling you to get out of my *apartment,* Binghe!”

Luo Binghe's jaw clenched. “Shizun, don't joke around. It doesn’t suit you.”

Shen Yuan's eyes burned with anger, but Binghe prepared himself for whatever his new shizun might try in order to fight his way from Luo Binghe. In the end, he didn't need to prepare for any attacks Shen Qingqiu would have thrown at him. Shen Yuan crossed his arms and faced away from Binghe.

“...shizun?”

Binghe stepped in front of Shen Yuan's sight. He turned his body away once again. Ah.

“Shizun, this is very childish,” Binghe chided.

“I'm not talking to you until you leave for at least a whole day.”

A whole day!? But one day here was a week in Binghe's world! He scoffed. “Does Shen Yuan think he is in any position to order this lord?”

Shen Yuan didn't say another word. The more he was ignored, the more Luo Binghe grew irritated. As the emperor, he was no stranger to brute forcing his way through unreasonable demands. Binghe stepped around Shen Yuan and forcibly cupped his face. Too weak to escape his grasp or turn away, shizun had no choice but to stare back at the demon.

“Don't you dare look away from me!” Binghe roared.

Shen Yuan closed his eyes.

“You damned bastard!” Binghe screamed.

Fine. Fine!

“I don't need you!” Luo Binghe barked. He stormed into the living room, grabbing Xin Mo. “See if I ever come back!”

Shen Yuan called out right when Binghe stepped through the portal. “Wait, Binghe-”

Whatever the man was going to say was swiftly cut off by Xin Mo's vile screeching. Luo Binghe persevered and strode through his castle with complete calm and control. It was Sha Hualing who slunk up to him mischievously. “Junshang, what is that in your hand?”

“Xin Mo.” Binghe's eyes flashed. “Need to see it closer?”

She hummed happily. “Such a flirt… but I mean your other hand.”

Other hand-?

He couldn't believe it. He'd brought Shen Yuan's sleeping shirt back through the portal. He scoffed. “Leave me.”

He only devoted a minute to tossing the t-shirt into some corner of the emperor's absurdly large chambers before he made his way to the court. Seated on the throne again, the palace rejoiced to hear their emperor had returned.

There were so, *so* many wives demanding his time.

On his first day back, he went on an adventure with Shi Wen to liberate her home village. After beheading the old tyrant who had captured and enslaved her (virgin sacrifice) sister, the

town hailed their allegiance to Luo Binghe. His wife and her younger sister offered themself up to Binghe together as thanks.

…Binghe wondered if Shen Yuan was all alone at the moment, or if he was spending the rest of his day with Shen Mei. Shizun's sister would probably be happy to have Binghe gone. His lips twitched into a smile at the thought, which the others mistook as excitement.

“Lord Luo!” Shi Hua squealed happily. Luo Binghe shook his head, said he needed to rest after his battle, and left the two perplexed women to their own devices.

On day two, he perused the library and found out Liu Mingyan had added her own writing. He read half a chapter before returning the book to its respective shelf.

On the third day, he gave in. He shoved his face into Shen Yuan's shirt, and inhaled the scent as deeply as he could. After hald an hour of this, he returned to the library and checked out Mingyan's book. Then he spent four more hours with his face buried in Shen Yuan's sleepwear while he fucked his hand.

On day four, he called for a concubine and handed her the shirt. “Put it on.”

She was overjoyed. “After all these months away from the harem, Lord Luo has chosen this lowly one to service-”

“Stop!” Her fair hands paused where she was pushing the fabric over her ample chest. Luo Binghe pulled the shirt off her with speed and precision, studying it with fear. “You almost stretched it out!”

“Deepest condolences, junshang.” She pressed her bare breasts together with her arms as she leaned towards him. “But Qing'er can't help it if her bosom is so big and heavy…”

Binghe wasn't listening or watching. The shirt's shape was the same as ever, but the smell…! It smelled like Madame Meiyin's flower pool, a fragrance that had been becoming more and more popular with demon women over the last few years. It… it didn't smell like Shen Yuan at all anymore.

Binghe growled to himself, and the demon hopped away like a frightened deer.

With his one connection to Shen Yuan severed, Luo Binghe was distraught. He wasn't lying when he said he didn't need that man! But… ahem, but what kind of demon emperor would he be if he spent months courting someone and had nothing to show for it, hm? So Binghe returned to Shen Yuan's world in half the time he'd been given.

He stepped into ~~his bedroom~~ Shen Yuan's guest bedroom, but paused instead of swinging the door open as usual. Shizun wouldn't be happy to see him back so early, so Binghe opened the guest door by barely an inch, peeking through into the living room. His heart jumped with joy seeing the slender man after so long apart. Although he had Shen Yuan's figure memorized, he still studied shizun's body with diligence.

Shen Yuan's pale thighs that had thickened considerably since he began gorging himself on Binghe's meals, and his charmingly short hair now reached down to his chin. Shen Yuan was dressed as provocatively as ever, with his small shorts and practically non-existent sleeves. He was sitting on the sofa, tracing his finger against the jar of snow Binghe had abandoned on the shelf- or at least, what it had melted into. What was left was nothing more than sugary water at this point.

Almost with remorse, shizun whispered, “Binghe…”

Shen Yuan was calling to him!? Shen Yuan had missed him so much he was talking to himself saying Binghe's name!? Luo Binghe burst into the other room. “I'm here, shizun!”

Shen Yuan jumped at the noise, knocking over the jar. The glass shattered and spilled everything Luo Binghe had sealed inside.

Chapter End Notes

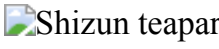
a/n: you see the snow is a metaphor ! still figuring out what for.

Slug, the beloved beta and the reason sunny hasnt been writing: ITS JIZZ because shes fucking high

sun: first of all youre no ones beloved . theres no second

:’[revokingshizun plush privileges

sun: OH YEAH GUYS LOOK AT US PLAYING WITH SLUG'S SHIZUN PLUSHIE!!! heres the tea party we had for them


Shizun teaparry

Chapter 4: salt and liquid blend from the corner of my eyes

Chapter Notes

> a good portion of this chapter is set in a child's pov, which means youre going to get a LOT of second hand embarrassment. But if you read it and think 'wow this is so cringe and stupid and everything is so blown out of proportion.. but its also a little endearing' then that means i'll have done a good job at writing a kid
>
> But first, bingge being a freak

See the end of the chapter for more notes

This world, like any place, had its own erotica. Luo Binghe had seen crude novels and paintings depicting sex, but there was nothing back home quite like videos on the internet .

Cut sleeve dual cultivation

Gay porn

Man naked glasses

Chinese man naked glasses short black hair

Chinese man with glasses porn sick thin short bottom embarrassed moaning teacher fucked by demon student with long black hair

Luo Binghe's search history was beginning to look a bit pathetic.

Binghe had never bothered partaking in pornography before- if he was ever in the mood, it was easy to find a woman to help relieve himself. But for several days, he couldn't even imagine doing such a thing… and if he did imagine, the woman in his head always quickly transformed into a familiar man.

After lazily scrolling through several sites for an hour, Binghe's eyes snapped to a specific thumbnail: a gaunt young man with light brown hair kneeling on the floor. His skin was too tanned to be considered similar to Shen Yuan, but their similar haircuts were enough.

The video began with his partner restraining his arms and legs with bright red rope. Then he stood up and slapped the man on the floor. "Beg."

Luo Binghe shoved his hand in his pants.

He didn't even attempt to pull at his confines, resigning himself to his partner's utter control. "Please…"

It was too easy to imagine Shen Yuan in the actor's place. Shizun would look so delectable with red ropes tied around his pale and fragile skin. He would be at Binghe's mercy, unable to ever deny him what Binghe ~~yearned for~~ deserved.

The one left standing stroked his cock just out of reach, until his partner whined for it. Finally, he grabbed the man's hair roughly and fucked into his mouth.

The person in the video was eager to serve, slobbering all over the man, but Shen Yuan wouldn't be so bold. His thin faced teacher would flush bright red and refuse until Binghe coaxed him into opening his pretty lips.

"Shizun," Binghe whispered. He hadn't intended to, but hearing his own voice say that name during such a moment made his body react further. He closed his eyes, imagining it was Shen Yuan's mouth around him instead of his hand, and groaned. "Shizun, shizun!"

The simple daydream of Shen Yuan on his knees progressed wildly. What if shizun could hear him? Luo Binghe could feel his heart pounding away as he fucked into his fist. Maybe he wanted Shen Yuan to hear him. What if he had his ear pressed to Binghe's door right now? What if shizun heard and touched himself to Binghe's voice? What if he had his mouth stuffed with his fist to keep himself quiet while he jerked off to Luo Binghe's moans? It was an impossible fantasy, but that didn't stop the demon.

By the time he opened his eyes again, the video had progressed several minutes forward. The two of them were having sex in full now, the unbound man slamming his hips into the other's ass roughly while the one under him moaned like a whore. He wanted so badly to hear what Shen Yuan would sound like on his dick. He wanted to pound into his shizun until Shen Yuan couldn't think of anything else, until there was no question of who he belonged to.

"Only me, shizun…" Binghe threw his head back at the mental image. "Mine, my shizun, you're *mine…"*

It would be so easy to overpower him. Shen Yuan was always so prudent and unflappable, there was nothing Binghe wanted more than to hold the man down and *force* a reaction out of him. No matter how good an actor he was, Shen Yuan could only hold onto so much of his dignity while Binghe- no, *his disciple* fucked him.

"Yes, *yes."* Binghe sped up, his breath getting heavier with each thrust. "Shizun…" Binghe didn't even notice the video ending, completely caught up in his thoughts.

Shen Yuan's thighs would look so sweet, spread out for Binghe. Ah, if only he could steal Shen Yuan away to his homeworld… Shen Yuan would be *perfect* in one of Sha Hualing's indecent outfits, or thrown into a pit of sentient vines, or enchanted with a womb tattoo, or- fuck, maybe Binghe could find the Heart's Soul Twin Mirror again and get *two* Shen Yuans and make them both-

Binghe finished in his hand with a muffled groan.

The only source of light in the room was the laptop's screen. In a moment, he was keenly aware of his surroundings again. This was Shen Yuan's guest bedroom, and Luo Binghe had

just used his computer to masturbate to its owner. His face felt hot, like shame was crawling over his skin.

It was half past three in the morning. Binghe's keen ear could hear Shen Yuan sleeping in his own bedroom, his breath deep and steady. So he'd just been asleep this whole time… Even though his earlier fantasy had been extremely unlikely, he'd still wanted shizun to be thinking about him. The disappointment was almost tangible. Luo Binghe felt an unrest in his meridians, like fish were swimming through his veins.

After cleaning up, he hid the laptop away and made his way to Shen Yuan's room. The doorknob jiggled under his hand but stayed stubbornly in place. Locked. Binghe sighed. How many times would he need to destroy these flimsy metal slots before shizun stopped replacing them?

After sneaking in, he kneeled by the bed. Luo Binghe watched Shen Yuan's face with complete concentration.

Shen Yuan was so beautiful in this state… without his sharp eyes piercing into Binghe, shizun looked so soft. He wanted to caress and kiss Shen Yuan's lovely face without end, but Luo Binghe couldn't even bear to touch him in this state. He was frightened by how intensely he longed to hold the man. What if Shen Yuan was addictive? What if Binghe wanted more, and more, and more until it consumed him? Already there was an itch in him that begged Binghe to curl up against shizun, like an obsessive drinker craving another bottle.

"I can hear your heart, shizun," Binghe whispered. "Do you know? I've been listening all this time…"

He spent hours fixated on Shen Yuan's face, not even daring to blink. The uncomfortable movements under his skin were becoming difficult to ignore.

Binghe didn't know how long he sat there, but when shizun shifted under the rays of daylight, Binghe sprinted out of the room with a pounding heart. He fled to the kitchen, like a cat hiding before its owner could yell at it for doing something it wasn't supposed to.

Sure enough, it didn't take long before shizun's voice rang out through their home. "Binghe!" Shen Yuan called. "There's only so many times I can get these locks replaced before people start asking questions!"

Luo Binghe didn't apologize. Shizun didn't expect an apology from him. Shizun didn't expect *anything* from him. The man's motives were still a complete mystery, after all these months.

Shen Yuan exited his room, humming in surprise when he saw the bare dining table. "No breakfast today?"

"Binghe can make breakfast," he said quickly. He pulled out a chair, and when Shen Yuan didn't immediately sit, he pushed the man from behind.

“Hey, what- calm down, I’ll sit!” Shizun huffed and rolled his eyes, but settled himself in the seat Binghe had chosen for him. Shen Yuan stared at the wall, discomfort apparent on his face for several long minutes. Finally, he snapped, “if there’s something you want to say, just say it!”

He’d been staring, hadn’t he? “Is Shen Yuan a virgin?”

He… hadn’t meant to say that.

Shen Yuan gave Binghe a withering deadpan. “Good morning to you as well, Luo Binghe. I agree, it really is a beautiful day.”

"Good morning, isn't it a beautiful day, shizun?” Binghe said. His words were breathy and fast-paced, like he'd been hit by an electric current. “Shizun, there will be clear skies today, so make sure you wear your sunscreen! In the news, there is a major story regarding the president's newest press release. I'm thinking of making something Korean for lunch. Now please, *please* tell this disciple if you've ever taken anyone inside your body."

Shen Yuan's mouth dropped open, unable to comprehend the demon lord’s state. As quickly as he’d sat down, he stood up again. “You know what, I’m not very hungry right now, so-”

“Sit down,” Binghe growled. His order only caused Shen Yuan to glance towards the apartment’s front door, so Binghe politely added, “please.”

“Um.” Shizun gulped nervously. Binghe eyed the way his throat bobbed. “I actually…”

Luo Binghe tuned out whatever excuses Shen Yuan was sputtering out, and examined the body he’d been thinking about so intently for days now. Shen Yuan’s weak arms. Shen Yuan’s thin eyebrows. Shen Yuan’s small stature. Shen Yuan, Shen Yuan- “Shen Yuan.”

Shen Yuan paused his rambling. “Y-yeah?”

Oh, he’d said that aloud. Whatever. Binghe moved closer, his gaze moving lower while he recalled his thoughts from the night before. “Shizun, stay still. I need to check something.”

Shen Yuan yelped when Luo Binghe placed a hand over his pelvis. "Binghe, what the fuck!"

"Shizun, please," Binghe begged. Shen Yuan didn't say another word, though the stiffness of his shoulders said everything. Trailing upwards, Binghe's hand stopped once it had travelled the length of his own pillar.

If he forced himself all the way inside, he'd… Binghe would reach above Shen Yuan's navel, just a few inches short of his diaphragm. Was that even physically possible? Would Shen Yuan be able to take him?

In his daze Binghe whispered, "I could *destroy* you."

“What?” Shen Yuan's muscles tightened even more in panic. "I thought we put the threats behind us."

Threats? *Threats?*

Binghe laughed at his shizun's incognizance. "Threats, hahaha… haha… shizun thinks… haha…"

He leaned his forehead against the top of shizun's head. Binghe could smell his shampoo, could see Shen Yuan's short hair showing off that sinfully snowy neck just begging for someone to-

Binghe bit into Shen Yuan's neck. The unsettling feeling that had been eating away at Binghe's sanity slowed, and the ache that had been present for hours came to a halt. He gnawed on shizun's skin, sighing in relief when he held the man still with his teeth.

Binghe had seen wild animals do this when he went on night hunts as a child. Once, a cat-like monster had chased down a gazelle in front of him, and held the gazelle's throat in its jaws. In an attempt to scare him, one of his shixiongs explained: instead of a quick kill, some predators preferred to crush their prey's windpipe, or hold it down until it became too weak to attempt escape. Then the monster would eat its catch alive.

He'd found it frightening at the time. Now it sounded incredibly appealing.

Shizun cried out in pain, but Luo Binghe kept his teeth firmly placed in the soft flesh.

"Binghe," he whispered. "Stop…"

Desperate to keep the man in place, he tightened his grip until his canines broke through the skin. Blood flooded into his mouth, and Shen Yuan whimpered. Even Binghe's addled mind could tell he'd gone too far.

As soon as he freed his hold on the man, shizun was staggering away, pressing a hand to his injured neck. "Shizun," Binghe breathed out. "Come back."

In the back of his head, he knew he was behaving like some deranged animal. How terrible he must have looked, standing in front of Shen Yuan with desperate eyes and a bloody mouth…

Shen Yuan's legs gave out under him. Binghe lunged forward and caught him by the waist halfway from the ground. Shizun looked up with terrified eyes, held mid-air in a dip. His glasses had slid down his nose enough to show off those lovely eyes again. Binghe traced his thumb down Shen Yuan's arm sensually, grabbing his hand when he reached the end. "Let's dance, shizun."

He pulled Shen Yuan up onto his feet, pressing their fronts flush together. Shen Yuan instinctively grabbed onto Luo Binghe's shoulder for support. His fragile heartbeat was a jumbled mess. "No more," he begged.

"What do you mean?" Binghe stepped forward, and Shen Yuan had no choice but to step back. They moved in tandem, like a practiced pair at a ball. "Isn't this fun, shizun?" Binghe pressed his leg into the smaller man's crotch.

Shizun yelped and pulled his hands off Binghe's body like he'd been burned. Binghe released him as well. His cute little Shen Yuan tried to run, and the second he turned his back to Binghe, the demon took his hand once more. Lifting their joined hands over the short man's head, he spun his teacher until Shen Yuan faced him again. A perfect twirl.

Shizun tried to shake Binghe off, so he let him. Now with two free hands, one returned to Shen Yuan's waist. The other groped at Yuan's thigh, lifting his leg until it had been hooked over Binghe's hip. The helpless human was forced to wrap his arms around Binghe's neck for balance.

"Shizun…" Binghe nosed back into Shen Yuan's neck, trailing upwards until he was nuzzling against shizun's cheek like an affectionate pet. *"Shizun."*

He'd forgotten that blood was still smeared across his mouth- there was now a thin line of Shen Yuan's own blood drying on his face as well. He breathed out shakily, "Binghe, stop it."

"Or what? Will you send me away again?" Binghe giggled. "That won't work any more, shizun. I'm not going anywhere, no matter how much you reject me."

His shizun's heart really would give out any second now if Binghe scared him any more than this. Their tango came to an abrupt end when Binghe's hand took hold of his dance partner's neck. Shen Yuan closed his eyes in resignation like he fully expected Binghe to- he didn't want to think about that.

The wound was only skin-level, so Binghe could heal it simply by pouring some qi into the area. The gash closed itself slowly, and Binghe watched Shen Yuan cautiously open his eyes again. There were unshed tears coating his lashes. Shizun really was so pretty…

"Binghe," shizun croaked out, "what is the matter with you today?"

There was something wrong with him, wasn't there? The storm brewing in him was becoming more painful by the second. Now it was Binghe who could barely stay standing.

"Shizun," Binghe muttered. "Don't hate me."

Shen Yuan eyed him warily. Binghe took shizun's hand and pressed it against his face, sighing in relief when the pain momentarily faded again. "Binghe, you're burning up!"

"Shizun," he continued mumbling to himself. "Even if you hate me, it's okay. I… I won't…"

"Binghe," shizun pleaded. "Tell me what to do. You're a heavenly demon, you shouldn't be able to get *sick."*

"Don't go," he said. "Hurts less with you." He pulled Shen Yuan into a hug and clung to him, convinced his shizun would push him away if he didn't. "Don't go…"

He refused to let go. Shizun would run away if he did. He'd met that kind Shen Qingqiu, and underestimated him, and that was why he'd gotten away, but Binghe would not make that same mistake with Shen Yuan, and-

Binghe tightened his hold. “You will *not* escape from me.”

“Who's trying to escape?” Shen Yuan said softly. “Stop thinking silly things and tell me how to fix this.”

Luo Binghe’s eyes were becoming too heavy to keep open. “You can't leave…”

He fell unconscious in the middle of the living room.

Luo Binghe woke up alone in his bed. The windows were still letting in daylight, but he felt like he’d slept for several hours. Just how long had he been knocked out?

The pain from the day before had cleared up, but the daze remained. His body felt off-balance, like he’d spent years away from it and just returned. Luo Binghe wobbled into the living room and found shizun pacing around in deep thought. “Shizun!”

Shen Yuan gaped as he took in Binghe’s state. “...Luo Binghe?”

“Shizun,” Binghe rubbed his bleary eyes as he looked up at Shen Yuan.

Wait, up?

Actually, everything looked so big… Binghe reached out to Shen Yuan, and instead of his usually broad and strong hands, he saw small and chubby pebbles in front of him. His oversized robe fell off his shoulder at the movement.

Shen Yuan kneeled in front of him, holding his hands. “Binghe, what happened to you?”

What happened? What did he mean? Binghe caught his reflection on the TV’s blank screen. He was no taller than an eight year old boy. All of Binghe’s senses screamed at him to *run.*

Shen Yuan called out for him when Binghe dashed for Xin Mo. It was too heavy, and he couldn't even make it budge from its place, much less pick it up. Panic grew in him as he realized he'd truly returned to being a child- he had no strength and no cultivation.

Someone stepped between him and the sword. “Calm down, Binghe, we can-”

Binghe cried out in fear and ran back the way he’d come. Back in the bedroom where he’d woken up, he looked around frantically for something to defend himself with. He remembered being this age. He remembered that the world was not a kind place to him then.

The door creaked. “Binghe-”

Binghe dove under the bed. There was just enough space for him to cower and shake.

He could see Shen Yuan bend his legs to lean down, and his face came into view. “Binghe, what are you doing down there?”

BInghe whimpered and didn’t answer.

"Hey, it's okay." Shen Yuan reached out his hand. "Look, it's just me."

Binghe sniffled. “Shizun?”

"...yes. It's shizun.” Before, Shen Yuan had always tolerated the word ‘shizun’ with good nature, like someone indulging a child playing pretend. Now he reached his hand out with a serious look. “Listen to your shizun, Binghe. Come out.”

Luo Binghe hesitated.

“Are you scared?”

“No!” Binghe cried out immediately. If he insulted shizun, he’d be angry! And if he got angry…

Shen Yuan was quiet for a moment. “It’s okay if you are. You’re in a scary situation.” He smiled and tried to reach further towards the child, but his arm could only go so far. “Trust me, Binghe. Shizun won’t hurt you. And I won’t allow anyone else to hurt you either.”

Luo Binghe’s time as Shen Qingqiu’s disciple had taught him such pleasant words were rarely ever true. But still, he whispered, “...promise?”

“Promise.”

Luo Binghe bit his lip, at war with himself. His reasoning told him anyone would take advantage of him while he was in a state like this. His reasoning also told him there was only so long he could hide here before Shen Yuan lost his patience and forced him out.

He shuffled out from underneath the bedframe slowly, keeping his eyes downcast. His body jerked in fear when shizun touched him, but relaxed when he realized it was just a headpat.

“Shizun,” Binghe whined pathetically. “This one is stupid, and seems to have suffered a qi deviation…”

“None of that,” Shen Yuan denied at once. He stroked Binghe’s head lovingly. “What cultivator of worth has never faced a setback, ah? Binghe should not belittle himself.”

Oh, shizun…

“Tell me what you need, Binghe.”

Perhaps in the right state of mind, he would have known how to fix this. But right now he was frightened and confused. “Binghe needs shizun,” he answered. Shen Yuan hummed for him to continue and Binghe said shyly, “Binghe needs to touch shizun.”

Shizun smiled and grasped his hand slowly. Shen Yuan's skin was always cold, but Binghe still felt warmed by it.

He entwined their fingers. "Binghe needs a hug…"

Once again, Shen Yuan indulged him. He pulled Binghe into his chest, pressing the boy's face into his collar. Luo Binghe took a deep inhale of the scent he'd come to associate with home.

How ironic. Shen Yuan had no qualms with disrespecting an emperor, but obeyed a helpless child's every demand. But it made sense. He'd seen the way Shen Yuan cared for his little sister, and the way he teased and played with children he knew. Luo Binghe would be able to get much further in this state. Slowly, his mind began to clear. He could take advantage of this situation.

"Kiss?" Binghe asked. When Shen Yuan faltered, he fluttered his lashes and let his lips tremble, pretending he was on the verge of tears. "Shizun doesn't like this disciple?"

Shen Yuan's uncertainty melted away. He kissed Binghe's forehead, right on his heavenly demon mark, and Binghe's heart fluttered. "How could shizun not like Binghe, ah? Silly boy."

His hands clutched shizun's shirt. Who knew it was so easy to make Shen Yuan do what he wanted? "More," Binghe demanded.

"That's enough for now."

"I want more!" Binghe insisted.

"No more. There's a global kiss shortage," Shen Yuan said with a blush. "Only one kiss a day is available, the kiss factory is on strike."

"Shizuuun."

When Binghe stepped back, his foot caught on the adult-sized sleeping robes he was still wearing. He groaned when he tripped and fell to the ground.

Shizun helped him up. "Come on, let's get you into something that fits. Meimei usually leaves some of her clothes here-"

"Don't talk about her," Binghe mumbled. "She wants to keep you away from me."

"She just wants to make sure you don't skin me alive," shizun replied. "After what happened yesterday, I was worried about that, too."

Shen Yuan dug out an old pair of jean shorts that had shrunk in the wash, and one of his sister's shirts. A belt held his bottoms from sliding down too much, but it was Shen Mei's item that made him look completely ridiculous. It was a pastel pink tee with the words *'you can't afford me'* written on the front. It must have been a cropped top, but it fit his child body

perfectly. Shen Yuan burst into hysterical laughter when Binghe waddled out in his new outfit. “It’s *not* funny- put your phone away!”

After taking a few photos, Shen Yuan had his fill. “Come on, let’s get you some real clothes.”

Luo Binghe threw on a thick cardigan before he left the apartment. Because unlike Shen Yuan, he wasn’t a pervert.

The doorman in the lobby raised an eyebrow at the small child leaving with shizun, but did not say anything about his resemblance to the *Luo Binghe* shizun frequently brought home. Walking to the car waiting for them was an embarrassing hassle. He had nothing to wear but oversized flip flops, and he’d nearly tripped twice on the way.

Binghe stood in the shop while a tailor took his measurements. “We only need two or three outfits,” Shen Yuan explained to her. “One to walk out in, and the rest can be delivered.”

“We have some children’s clothes ready for now, but they won’t be a perfect fit…”

Luo Binghe left the two adults to speak among themselves and wandered off into the store. He paused at the slew of magazines spread in the waiting room, and opened one up.

Shen Yuan joined him later, holding a bag of clothes. “What is Binghe reading?”

He hadn’t been reading as much as flipping through them. He’d randomly stopped at an ad showing a large children’s park.

“Oh, it's that time of year again.” Shen Yuan grinned. “Get changed, Binghe. Let shizun take you somewhere fun.”

Shen Yuan covered his face with a blue mask before entering the gates. Binghe scowled. “I don’t want to be here.”

“At least give it a try,” shizun insisted. “You’ll like it! Meimei loved coming here when she was…”

“When she was what!” Binghe demanded. Shizun laughed at his offense.

The ‘amusement park’ was overwhelming. There were too many people, too many sounds, and too many things. But luckily Binghe only had to focus on one thing: Shen Yuan’s soft hand holding his. “Don’t let go,” shizun instructed. “I don’t want you getting lost here.”

Binghe happily obeyed and clung on.

They acquired a small paper map from a kiosk. “We don’t need to worry about height requirements in this area. Where do you want to go first?”

He studied the map. “Tunnel of horrors?” Binghe read aloud.

“Oh, that’s the haunted house.” Shen Yuan guided him to their left. “Let’s go!”

The ‘haunted house’ was extremely boring. And it wasn’t haunted.

They walked down the tunnel, neither of them saying a word. A doll dropped from the sky before slowly lifting back up for the next group. Shizun sighed. “Is this what they were screaming about before us?”

“This isn't scary!” Binghe stated.

He stared at Shen Yuan expectantly, but the man didn’t take the hint at all! He just nodded in disappointment. “Yeah, these are really cheap looking props.”

“I *said* it's not scary at all!” Binghe repeated.

“Oh,” Shen Yuan exclaimed. He bent down at the knee to pat Binghe's head. “Yes, Binghe wouldn't find it scary,” he praised, “because Binghe is strong and brave.”

Took him long enough to say so! “And it's for little kids!” Binghe added.

Shen Yuan snickered for a second before forcing his voice into neutrality again. “Yes, Binghe is very smart and big for his age.”

That's right, he was! Good thing shizun understood excellence when he saw it… “Don’t worry, gege.” Binghe pulled Shen Yuan down the tunnel. “I’ll protect you.” After all, the protection of a heavenly demon had won him many wives!

They continued their leisurely walk, laughing at the glowing plastic goblins lighting their path. They exited out the other end and squinted at the sunlight. “The only thing horrifying about that was how bad it was,” shizun said. Binghe nodded.

They wandered around aimlessly. Shen Yuan explained he couldn’t accompany him on the higher roller coasters, but would wait by the line. Luo Binghe shook his head and pulled him along onto the carousel, where shizun could join him.

“Here, try this,” Shen Yuan said. “It’s a candy apple.”

Candy apple? Like tanghulu? Binghe bit into the red treat and nearly gagged. It was terrible! The covering was too gooey and sugary, and the apple was too hard and sour. Binghe had one bite and scrunched up his face. “You like this!?”

“Ah, Binghe doesn’t like it?” Shen Yuan replied sadly. “I can’t have street food, so if you’re not going to eat it...”

Oh. Right. Luo Binghe surprised the man by quickly devouring the apple. Between bites he said, “if shizun can’t have any, I’ll eat it for him.” Even if it was awful!

The second Binghe threw out the remaining core, shizun tugged him into a tight hug. “Ah, why can’t you just stay like this forever!”

~~That's right, why couldn’t he?~~

“There’s prizes here!” Binghe said excitedly. The stuffed toys hanging from the tents were bigger than his own body- shizun would be so happy when Binghe gave one to him!

“Be careful, Binghe,” shizun warned as Luo Binghe handed tickets to the vendor. “A lot of these games are rigged.”

“I can win them,” Binghe said confidently. He was handed a ball and told to throw it into a netted hoop. Now the ‘rigged’ part made sense- the hoop was barely any larger than the ball.

With his small body, he had to jump to get the ball high enough. It bounced on the basket before falling in. The merchant passed it back to Binghe. “Uh, two more for a medium prize and four more for a large…”

Shizun muttered something along the lines of, “as expected of the protagonist…” that Binghe ignored. He was completely focused on the game.

“I’m going to get more tickets for us. You stay right here, okay?”

Binghe nodded to whatever shizun was saying. A small crowd had formed around him as he made one throw after another. He was so close to winning the biggest prize! Shizun would be so excited, and he’d praise Binghe so much…

When he got the fifth ball into the net, everyone around him cheered. Binghe pointed to the oversized white cat and excitedly took the plush from the vendor. “Shizun, did you see!? I won!”

Shen Yuan wasn’t present to shower him with congratulations and hugs. Binghe looked around. Where was he?

One of the men watching him stepped up. “You only paid two tickets to play, right?” He took out his wallet. “What if I give you *ten* tickets for what you won? That’s five times as much!” Binghe tried to step around him, but the man stubbornly blocked his path. “Think about it, you can give up one toy, and then win five! It’s a good deal.”

“Leave me alone!” Binghe held the cat close to his chest. “I got this for shizun!”

“I’ll give you twenty,” a woman exclaimed. Everyone took that as an invitation to some sort of auction. Soon the crowd that had been cheering for him was yelling out different bids. Binghe clutched onto his prize and fled.

The stuffed toy was so large it dragged onto the ground with every step. Binghe didn’t want to get it dirty, but what else could he do? He closed his eyes, trying to resonate with the blood

he'd left in Shen Yuan. Luckily he could sense its location, even if he could do nothing else with it. Binghe found him by the ticket booth, excitedly chatting with a woman in line. "Shizun!"

"Binghe! You got-"

"Where were you!?" Binghe demanded. "I won, and you didn't even see!"

Shen Yuan smiled sheepishly. "Yes, you did great. Just give me a second…"

Then he turned his back to Binghe and returned to his conversation.

…that was it? Everyone else thought Binghe was amazing. Where was his proper due? What was this little bit of praise? Why wasn't Shen Yuan impressed…? "Why are you talking to her so much! I won, so forget about her!"

"Binghe!" Shen Yuan gave the woman a tired frown. "I'm sorry about him. Binghe, apologize right now!"

The words sent an almost physical pain through his chest. Shizun was picking this stranger over him? "I hate you!" Binghe screamed as he ran away.

It really hurt… every time he thought of Shen Yuan's disappointed face, his heart throbbed with agony. *You promised you wouldn't hurt me,* Binghe thought as he raced through the park. *Liar.*

Binghe perched himself on a bench with his giant dirty cat. This time he'd learned his lesson for sure! He was never going to trust shizun again…

(Secretly, he hoped Shen Yuan would run after him and admit he was wrong. If he begged and said he'd never pick anyone else over Binghe again, he might consider allowing him to remain his shizun.)

Binghe's heart jumped in excitement when Shen Yuan took a seat next to him. "Binghe, shizun is sorry," he said. "Shizun shouldn't have yelled at you. Won't you forgive me?"

"Too late!" Binghe sniffled. "I already decided to hate you forever!"

"Forever is a long time," Shen Yuan mused. Shen Yuan wiped something off Binghe's face, and Binghe petulantly turned his head away. "I was going to take us shopping tomorrow and let you pick out my new clothes, but I guess you'll still be mad at me then."

Let Binghe pick out shizun's clothes!? Binghe could get so many pretty clothes to match the beautiful man-

No, no! He had to focus! He hated Shen Yuan forever! He had to stay firm on this!

Seeing Binghe remain resolute, Shen Yuan sighed. "And I'll let you throw out one thing from my closet."

“Really!?” Binghe hopped to his feet. He couldn't believe it! He'd get to buy shizun outfits fit for his bride, and also get rid of those terrible graphic shirts at the same time! “Really, and you won't get mad? Even if it's that ugly cucumber shirt!?”

“Hey,” he objected softly. He shifted closer, until he was bumping his shoulder against Binghe's. “But yes. Let it be shizun's apology.”

“Yay!” Binghe hopped to his feet and pulled at Shen Yuan’s sleeve. “Let's go right now!”

“Tomorrow. Everything is closed by now.” Shizun looked around. “Actually, it’s later than I thought. Let's go on the ferris wheel for our last ride.”

All of a sudden, Binghe wanted to go home soon as well. But first, he held the stuffed toy up in front of him. It was so large it covered his view, and he couldn’t see Shen Yuan. “Shizun, I got it for you,” Binghe said. “Don't you like it?”

“For me? Wouldn’t you rather keep it?”

Binghe shook his head before he remembered shizun couldn’t see him either. He pushed the toy into the older man’s arms. “It’s for you.”

Shizun took it out of Binghe’s hold. He looked both touched and conflicted. “Binghe…”

“Let’s go, gege,” Binghe said. Shizun speechlessly followed after him towards the large spinning wheel.

Only after they boarded their small cabin did Shen Yuan finally pull down his face mask. “Oh, this is the perfect time to come here. It’s just dark enough to see all the lights.”

Binghe pressed his palms against the window as he looked outside. The sun had just set, leaving the city's lights to shine like stars over the landscape. They were high enough to see the entire park, as well as several high rise buildings looming over the horizon. “Shizun’s world is so beautiful,” Binghe breathed out.

“But it must be boring compared to where you're from.” Shizun propped his chin onto his hand, looking out the window lazily. The bright carnival lights reflecting off his face made him look even more gorgeous. “Your world has such interesting creatures and magical objects.” He glanced up at the sky. “We can't even see the stars with all this light pollution.”

“I like it more here,” Binghe decided. He gave Shen Yuan a meaningful look. “I like this world more, because shizun is here.”

Shizun grinned. “Ah, so young and already so good with these lines!”

Binghe stared at the world he'd grown so fond of. He meant what he said. He liked it here more than he'd ever liked his world. As the emperor, there were thousands, if not millions of people who relied on him. Shen Yuan was the only person *Binghe* could rely on.

I don't want to go back, Binghe realized. *I want to stay here with shizun.*

Luo Binghe was left speechless from his revelation, but Shen Yuan didn't have much else to say either. Neither of them said anything else until the wheel came to a stop.

"Good thing there's always taxis here," Shen Yuan said as they exited the park. They both tumbled into the backseat of a car. "Binghe must be tired." Shizun yawned. "I know I am."

"I'm fine," Luo Binghe mumbled. Shen Yuan snorted softly and pulled him closer until their sides were pressed together.

He almost fell asleep like that, with his head on Shen Yuan's shoulder in the back of a moving cab.

The two of them were ready to collapse when Shen Yuan finally opened the door to their apartment. Binghe was fully prepared to take a nap on the couch when shizun pulled out his fan. "Do you need to use the washroom? I'm going to take a bath."

Stupidly pushing his luck, Binghe blurted, "May this disciple join shizun?"

"Binghe may," Shen Yuan replied. Binghe's brain came to a screeching halt while the other man waved a soft breeze, unbothered. "The tub is big enough for us both."

Ah. Luo Binghe must have been having auditory hallucinations. There was no way shizun really-

Shen Yuan pulled off his shirt, right in the middle of the room. When he stretched out his arms over his head with a groan, his chest and waist were practically on display. He deflated with a satisfied sigh and smiled at Binghe. "We'll use the one in my room."

Binghe was already out of his depth, and shizun wasn't even fully unclothed yet. He… may have bitten off more than he could chew. He followed Shen Yuan through his bedroom and into the private bath. While Luo Binghe was sweating frantically, the older man hummed and turned on the tap without a care.

When the tub was a quarter-way full, Shen Yuan unbuttoned his trousers. Binghe hurriedly glanced away.

Why was he behaving like some flustered maiden? To say Luo Binghe had seen people naked before would be an understatement. Binghe glanced back and watched Shen Yuan remove his

pants. He raked his eyes over him, from his outrageously short hair to his frail shoulders, down his fair back until he reached-

Binghe looked away again, even more disoriented than before.

He could hear water splashing as Shen Yuan entered the tub. “Binghe, are you going to bathe in your clothes?”

In order to fit both himself and Binghe in the tub, he sat with his knees pulled to his chest. Binghe wasn’t sure if he was relieved or disappointed that shizun's legs hid anything he hadn’t already seen. Binghe took off his new shirt, staring at his soft belly with shame.

“What’s wrong now?”

I look like a baby, that’s what’s wrong! This isn’t sexy at all!

Binghe sniffled sadly to himself as he disrobed and entered the water.

“Come here. Shizun will wash your hair.”

Binghe moved closer, shyly looking down at his lap. Shizun detached the shower head from the wall and sprayed it into his hair until he was drenched. Shen Yuan's hands were so gentle as they massaged soap into his scalp, and the water was so warm…

“Don’t fall asleep,” shizun laughed.

“I’m not…”

“I’ve seen that face before. Don’t think I’ll carry you out of the bath.”

Binghe pouted and closed his eyes when Shen Yuan rinsed out the shampoo.

"I don't have any of the creams you'll need for curly hair," shizun said, “but conditioner should do for now, right? Besides, you're Luo Binghe. You look good no matter what."

Shen Yuan then raked his fingers through Binghe's hair, separating the tangled locks before braiding them. He finished by taking a clasp and clipping Binghe's braid up so his hair would not touch the water.

While the 'conditioner' set into his hair, shizun lathered up Binghe's body with soap. In any other situation, someone feeling up his naked body would have aroused him, but at this moment… Binghe only felt warm. Safe and loved.

With all the cleaning done, they were left to sit silently in the tub, watching the steam rolling off the milky water. Binghe didn't think he'd ever felt so relaxed. His time at Cang Qiong had been torture, the endless abyss had been a fight for survival, and after that Xin Mo had been with him for decades, keeping him paranoid and irrational.

No, he'd experienced this kind of easy happiness once before, when his mother was still there to join him at every meal.

The quiet was broken with little *plop* s of teardrops falling into the bathwater. Both of them were equally shocked to find it was Luo Binghe crying.

"Binghe?"

"I miss my mom."

Once he said the words, his eyes flooded until he was outright sobbing.

He sniffled, trying to wipe away his tears. His hands had been soaking in the bath, so he only made his face wetter. “Shizun, I miss my mom! I want my mom!”

Luo Binghe’s achievements and triumphs would go down in history, but he would easily trade his palace for a single day with his mother.

Shen Yuan was caught in an uncomfortable position: he had a small child in front of him crying for his mother, but the woman was long gone. “I… alright, Binghe. We can-”

“Don’t lie to me,” Binghe whispered. “I know she’s dead. She died because of me.”

Shen Yuan gasped softly. “Binghe.”

“It’s true.” The water was getting colder by the second, and the bubbles had all died away. His small hand settled on his bare chest. Even after all this time, he still felt the absence of what should have been there. “She ate less and worked more so she could save up money and buy me real jade.” That enough had worn away her health. “And when she found out it was fake…” The heartbreak was what caused her illness.

Luo Binghe hadn’t understood that for a long time. He’d been a child, and his mother tried to protect him as much as she could. She’d never blamed him. Even during her final days, she only remarked he was a good son every time he made basic congee.

And in the end, Binghe wasn’t even allowed that counterfeit. The pendant had cost him his mother’s life, and his shixiong had thrown it away like trash. “What was the point?”

“I know you won’t believe me if I say it wasn’t your fault,” shizun said slowly. He squeezed Binghe’s hand. “But I think… in that moment when she first gave it to you, you must have been very happy. And seeing that must have made every missed meal worthwhile for her.”

Another round of tears ran down Binghe’s face. “Was it a waste?”

Shen Yuan stroked his head. “No. It wasn’t.”

Soon enough, Binghe’s weeping trailed off into quiet sniffling. After all that crying, he felt surprisingly at peace. Better than he had in a long time, in fact. Like a weight had been lifted off his shoulders. He was exhausted, but not unhappy.

Binghe dove under the water, shaking his head to clean any leftover cosmetics out of his hair. When he emerged from the water again, shizun was watching him expressionlessly. Binghe grabbed a towel and began drying himself. “We can’t stay here all day.”

Shizun smiled. “...you’re right. Let’s get to bed.”

“I want to wear gege’s shirt,” Binghe wailed.

Shen Yuan had already changed into his pyjamas and held out Binghe’s large sleeping robes instead. “What if you grow back tonight, hm? Will you pay for my poor torn up clothes?”

“I will! How much do they cost?”

“A bajillion yuan.”

“That’s not a real number!”

After some coaxing from shizun, Binghe grumbled and put on his oversized robe. Shen Yuan’s bedroom was lit by a lamp next to the bed, and when Binghe climbed onto the mattress, shizun locked his phone and put it away. “You’re sure you want to-”

“You said I could sleep here!” Binghe leapt into Shen Yuan’s chest and burrowed in. “You can’t change your mind!”

“Who said I was going to!” Shizun exclaimed. “Get off!”

“No!”

Shizun pushed him away. “At least let me turn off the lights, you brat!”

While shizun reached for the lamp, Binghe pulled the duvet over them both. With the room in darkness and his powers temporarily suppressed, he couldn’t see Shen Yuan. He could hear his breathing next to his, however, and feel his minute movements. Binghe reached out for something to hold and-

“Ow! Binghe, my eye!”

“Shizun!”

Shizun pushed away his hand. “Don’t move anymore, I’ll come to you instead.”

The other body in the bed shifted closer and closer, until shizun’s skin was pressed right up against Binghe’s. That was already more than what he’d been expecting, but shizun didn’t stop there. Shen Yuan turned onto his side and hung an arm around Binghe’s back, pulling him into his embrace.

Shizun nuzzled into his hair. Binghe could feel Yuan’s smile against his head. “Goodnight, Binghe.”

Binghe cuddled into the man, trying to press their bodies as close as possible. “Good… goodnight, shizun,” Binghe whispered.

Once Shen Yuan fell asleep, Binghe’s eyes naturally grew heavier as well. He felt shizun’s chest rise and fall with every deep breath, and the gentle rhythm lulled Binghe to sleep along with him.

That night, he dreamt he was back at the amusement park. He looked like the tall and strong emperor everyone wanted him to be, but he still clung onto Shen Yuan’s hand like a child. “Shizuuun, Binghe needs a kiss!”

The dream version of his shizun pulled at his robe. “Come down, then.”

Even after Binghe lowered his head for the short man, Shen Yuan still had to stand on the tip of his toes to reach his face. He kissed Binghe’s cheek, and the demon purred with satisfaction.

When Binghe woke, he was back in his adult form. Shen Yuan was still holding him.

Had he been pulled into Shen Yuan’s dream? Or was that the product of his own subconscious?

Luo Binghe closed his eyes again and revelled in his shizun’s warm embrace, trying to return to that sweet vision.

Chapter End Notes

> This chapter is NOT beta'd bc my trip away from home has come to an end and I've started working full time and we cannot figure out a schedule with our time zone differences :// born to bingqiu forced to capitalism 😞
>
> anyway, next chapter bingmeification reaches 100% so im very excited for that

Chapter 5: every inch revealed

Chapter Notes

HIII GUYSSS if youre wondering why its been so long since i updated its because i've decided to be a legit actual authour (like as a job). i spent a long time thinking I had to hold my writing to a higher degree if i was going to make it more than a hobby and then when i was talking to my therapist i realized quality writing is temporary, the sillies are eternal. so now im back to tomfoolery-maxxing and hijinks-pilling.

on another note, big BIIIG shoutout to ao3 user xiongky for this art. My first time seeing art of one of my fics I was crying throwing up losing my mind i would die for you.

anyway, onto binggeyuan!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Luo Binghe waited out on the balcony, watching the sun set over his land. A gentle breeze blew through his hair softly. It was the perfect atmosphere for a farewell.

“A-Luo?” Ning Yingying closed the door behind her and joined him by the railing. “You called for me?”

“Yingying,” Binghe said. He corrected himself, “Ning-shijie.”

She smiled. The title always made her so happy, happier than Binghe had seen her in decades. “What is it, A-Luo?”

“How much time has passed here since I began staying in that world?”

“...more than two years.”

That sounded about right. He’d known Shen Yuan for several months now, and spent most of his time in shizun’s world. He returned every now and then, but Luo Binghe knew his visits were becoming less and less frequent. “There must be many wives unsatisfied with this lord.”

“Don’t take it out on them,” she pleaded.

“You misunderstand, shijie.” Binghe turned back to the sunset. “That’s what I wanted to talk to you about. Tell me, if a general falls in battle, won’t his lieutenant naturally take his place and lead the men?”

He could feel Yingying’s eyes on him. “I… yes?”

Luo Binghe returned her gaze. “What this lord is trying to say is… when a man is no longer able, duty falls on the next in line to take charge. You have been first wife for decades, and excelled at the position.” Binghe placed a hand on her shoulder. “Congratulations on becoming the new harem master, shijie.”

Her jaw dropped. Binghe almost laughed at how shocked stupid she looked, but he knew there would be hell to pay once the surprise wore off.

“This one will leave Ning Yingying to adjust to her new status.” Binghe fled quickly before the woman could chase after him. “It's really a ‘learn on the job’ role, so you won't need me!”

He was halfway down the hall when the woman came to her senses. “A-Luo! Hey, come back! A-Luo! You-! *Don't you dare teleport away from me, Luo Binghe!”*

They set up their operations in Luo Binghe’s chambers. A scroll with the names of all his wives fanned out so long it trailed to the other side of the room. “Your wives have relied on you for protection, shelter, and food. You must make the necessary arrangements before you leave.”

“This will take so long.” Binghe stared at the unending list. “What if someone steals shizun’s heart while I'm away?”

His shijie snorted. “It's that easy and you still haven't managed?”

“I can't say I like this new attitude.”

“I don't give a fuck what you like,” Ning Yingying said bluntly. “I'm not your wife anymore.”

…fair point.

“First are Heng Xinyi and Lian Chao.” Ning Yingying dropped a stack of files atop the desk. “They were both residents of Caiyi Village before you brought them to the palace. We have funds for one house there, so we have to figure out….”

All this planning was making his head spin… he wanted to be with shizun. Yingying rattled on, and Binghe decided to nod occasionally as if he was listening while he lost himself in the fantasy of headpats from Shen Yuan.

“Okay!” Yingying said decisively. “Send them in!”

A servant nodded and went to fetch the women. They arrived with smiling faces, but their enthusiasm faded when they saw the serious expression on the first wife’s face. “Lord Luo, you called for us?”

There was a long silence. Yingying nudged him with her elbow and whispered, “why aren’t you saying anything?”

He was going to be doing the talking? Luo Binghe cleared his throat. “Heng Xinyi, Lian Chao. This lord no longer had use for a harem, or the two of you. I’ll give you the funds to return to Caiyi, or where you want to go. Farewell.”

All three women stared at him with jaws dropped open.

Ning Yingying’s face was growing redder with fury by the second. Was he supposed to say something else? “I wish you luck on your future endeavours,” Binghe added.

Heng Xinyi crossed her arms with a scowl. “My lord, this humble wife is very stupid and uneducated. This one is unfitting to understand your jokes.”

Lian Chao huffed in frustration. “If it is not necessary for this one to be here, I must return to my latest experiment.”

“This is no joke,” Binghe said seriously. “Since the two of you are both from Caiyi, we want you to decide now where you will be living now that our marriage is null.”

The wives' faces went pale. Yingying helpfully jumped in. “If you two could possibly live together-”

“Impossible,” Xinyi shot the idea down immediately. “I am at a pivotal point in cultivating the Angel Hairs Blessing of Benefits, and I do not have time for this.”

“The Angel Hairs Blessing of Benefits?” That got Lian Chao’s attention. “You can cultivate it in the palace? I thought it didn’t grow anywhere other than the harsh northern territories.”

Xinyi’s eyes softened at the comment, forced to give begrudging respect to anyone who could identify the plant. “That is usually the case.” With pride in her voice she said, “but this one hails from a long line of masters that specialize in horticulture.”

“Finding wild Angel Hairs requires so much time and effort…” Lian Chao turned to the woman with determination. “It’s not ideal, but if you give me access to your garden, I will happily live with you. In return, I can create potions that will keep Devil Mites away.”

“You can keep away Devil Mites!?” Heng Xinyi exclaimed. “You have a deal!”

“Great!” Ning Yingying said. The two women jumped in place, like they’d forgotten anyone else was present. “So you two will be sharing the home in Caiyi!”

“Ah, if we’re going to live together you should know…” Lian Chao blushed. “Sometimes my experiments can go wrong and create poison gasses, and the only antidote is… dual cultivation.”

Heng Xinyi’s eyes widened. “Well, I- that’s, um.” She coughed bashfully before saying, “we already agreed to help each other, right? If that happens, you can- you can come to me.”

Lian Chao twirled a lock of hair with her finger. “And you’ll help me feel better?”

“I’ll try.”

“Will you kiss me goodnight after?”

“I’ll kiss you goodnight every single day if that’s what you want…”

Luo Binghe and Ning Yingying shared stupified glances.

“You know, the soil around Hulao has the best properties for farming.”

Lian Chao nodded excitedly. “Yes, I was just thinking the same! There is also a big market for perfume there. With your flowers and my alchemy, we could make a huge profit!”

“Do you want to go there?” Xinyi asked. “I never liked Caiyi.”

“Me neither! There’s nothing to do there!” Lian Chao grabbed the other woman’s hand and pulled her towards the door. “Come on, let me show you my lab before I start packing it up!”

Xinyi followed her out. Binghe could hear their voices as they raced down the hall. “Okay! Afterwards I’ll show you my greenhouse!”

Oh, well. He was happy for them. It certainly made things easier for him. Actually, it made things a *lot* easier for him…

“Shijie.” Once they were gone, Luo Binghe picked up that list of wives, looking over the names. “Do you think there are any others who would like to, ahem, *work together?”*

“Oh no.” Yingying slammed her hand against the table. “I know what you’re doing, A-Luo. These are real women who trust you and have devoted their lives to you. You can’t just marry your wives off to each other on a whim to save time!”

“I’ll give you Mingyan.”

Ning Yingying sputtered as her face turned red again. “You- what- why- *A-Luo!”*

“Hualing too, if you’re willing to put up with her.”

“That’s it! I can’t with you anymore!” His ex-wife stormed out of the room. “I was going to help, but enjoy filing all your divorces alone!”

…with her out of the way, Binghe could begin his matchmaking and return to shizun’s world in record time.

“Shizun, you have something in your hair-”

“Hey, hey, hey!” Shen Yuan smacked the hand away with his fan. “Stand back, you're still on probation!”

Ever since his transformation, Shen Yuan had insisted on Binghe keeping a respectable distance from him. “Shizun, please. I was suffering from a qi deviation. It's not like I'm thinking about biting you *right now,”* Binghe lied.

It was all he'd been thinking about for days now. Everytime Luo Binghe caught a glance of Shen Yuan's neck, he practically began salivating. Whether shizun took notice of his hungry gaze or not, Luo Binghe currently wasn’t allowed within a metre of the man. He pouted and followed Shen Yuan into the coffee shop from a distance.

Queuing up to order, shizun absentmindedly glanced over the menu. “So what was the problem?”

They both stepped forward as the line moved along. “What do you mean?”

“What caused you to qi deviate?”

Luo Binghe wasn’t too sure himself. Before he could consider it, their attention was stolen by the young woman in front of them. “Wait,” she said as she dug through her wallet. “Maybe I have cash…”

Shen Yuan didn't hesitate. He walked to her side unprompted and tapped his card against the machine. Three little dots danced until they transformed into a checkmark on the screen and a receipt printed out.

The girl gasped. “You didn't have to do that!”

“It’s no bother-” Shen Yuan paused and blinked at the girl. “Shihan?"

Shihan gasped in response. “Laoshi!?"

The ardent way she was staring at Shen Yuan left Luo Binghe feeling a bit wary. “Yuan-ge, we have to order,” Binghe interrupted.

That only delayed their reunion by a minute or so. Shihan was waiting eagerly by the line for Shen Yuan to finish, and he joined her with their drinks. “It’s been a while,” shizun greeted her as he handed over her latte.

“Yes, it has!” She held the paper cup with both hands, like it was something extremely precious. “I’m sorry, I had to get my card cancelled because it was being used by someone else, and I forgot to take it out of my wallet, and then it got declined, and-”

Shen Yuan cut off her ramblings by directing her to a table. “Let’s sit down.”

Luo Binghe and Shen Yuan sat on one side with Shihan across from them, but if she even noticed Binghe’s presence, she didn’t comment on it. Her eyes were glued solely onto her

‘laoshi’. It was Shen Yuan who introduced them. “Binghe, this is my sister’s friend. Shihan, this is my roommate.”

Roommate? Surely they were more than that…

Shihan clearly wasn’t satisfied with the title either. “I don’t really talk with Mei that much anymore.”

He wondered why. Maybe Shen Mei didn’t want a friend that visibly drooled over her brother.

"Ah, all my friends call me Amy now…" The girl played with the plastic of her cup covering.

Shen Yuan took the change in stride. "If that's what you prefer, Amy."

'Amy' flustered more, pulling at her locks now. "Wha-what about laoshi? Do you prefer Shihan or Amy?" She giggled nervously. "You can say whichever one you want, I won't mind!"

Binghe rolled his eyes. He was really getting tired of Shen Yuan being unable to go anywhere without one of his admirers showing up.

…was this how everyone else felt when Binghe acquired a new wife? Thank goodness that was all behind him.

It was a very unfortunate and painful truth: though Shen Yuan looked quite plain at first glance, a single conversation was all it took for him to enchant most people. And while Luo Binghe’s beauty could make heads turn, Shen Yuan's lovely demeanour could captivate a person’s heart for years on end.

“You're not a child anymore,” Shen Yuan said instead of answering her question, “and I haven’t tutored you in a long time. You can just call me Shen Yuan.”

“I- I could never!”

“Yuan-ge,” Binghe interrupted again. “We still need to get groceries.” Shihan finally graced him with a scowl, but he paid her no mind. “The store closes early today, remember?” It did not close early today, but he’d had enough of this encounter.

“Alright.” Shen Yuan pushed his chair back to take his empty cup and stand up. “It was nice seeing you again.”

"Shen… Shen Yuan!" Shihan loudly exclaimed. Binghe glared at her, knowing Shen Yuan didn't like sudden noises, but she’d returned to ignoring him, completely enraptured by his shizun. Face flushed, she nervously gripped her hands together and stepped forward. "Uh, um, if you don't mind, can-can I have your number!?" Hurriedly, she added, "I just want to pay you back for the coffee!"

"Honestly, aren't college students supposed to be broke?" Shen Yuan just replied with a simple, oblivious smile. Binghe seethed with envy when shizun's hand settled on the girls head, patting it gently. "It's one coffee. Don't worry about it."

That really was Shen Yuan's style. Swooping in at a person's time of need, stealing their heart with his kindness, then pretending it all meant nothing and walking away.

"How about you ask Shen Mei for my number? It's good to reconnect with old friends."

Shihan grimaced. For once, Luo Binghe was glad Shen Mei was an unbreachable wall between the world and her brother.

"Shizun, we have to go!" He linked his arm with Shen Yuan's and dragged him out of the shop without looking back. Luo Binghe couldn't remain idle any longer. It was time to make his courting clear.

A quick internet search informed him where he could take Shen Yuan on a romantic date. A newly released film was being praised endlessly by couples who had seen it, and Luo Binghe found a movie theatre playing it within walking distance of the apartment.

When Luo Binghe asked shizun to accompany him, the man responded with, "That garbage novel actually became a movie?" Shen Yuan opened his phone's browser, looking up the reviews right away. "There's no way it's rated so highly! Either they completely changed the plot, or these are all bought comments! We have to go see it and…"

Binghe happily allowed Shen Yuan to drag him down the street to the showing.

Shen Yuan had taken Luo Binghe to the theatre plenty of times, so the large dark room full of strangers didn't alarm him as much as the first time. Shizun had his fan open in the seat next to him, even though the building was perfectly conditioned.

The audience hushed as the movie began. The scene opened with a man on one knee, holding a small box in front of the female lead.

"Proposing right off the bat?" Shen Yuan murmured at his side. "They skipped the first four chapters of the book."

Proposing. That was what Binghe had to do. He had to ask Shen Yuan to marry him. He just had to word it in a way that was so beautiful, shizun would have to say yes.

…how was he supposed to do that again?

This world was different from his. He couldn't just do someone a favour and expect to be repaid with a wife. Luo Binghe had never had to worry about being rejected before. For a former Qing Jing disciple, he had nothing poetic to say. He chose to blame that on Shen

Qingqiu's neglect. Yeah, the reason Binghe was panicking at the thought of proposing to Shen Yuan was all Shen Qingqiu's fault.

"Binghe, you alright?"

"Shizun."

Binghe's nervous voice fully stole Shen Yuan's attention away from the movie and back onto Binghe. The back of his neck felt wet.

"We should do that," Binghe blurted out. "What they're doing on the screen."

On screen, the man and woman were now wearing matching red outfits. Shen Yuan glanced at the film then back at Binghe. "...get married?"

"Um." Binghe cleared his throat. "If you want."

"...what's wrong with you?"

Luo Binghe grabbed Shen Yuan's hands, shocking the fan out of his grasp. The movie lit up the room barely enough for Binghe to make out Shen Yuan's features, but he stared into those lovely eyes nonetheless. "Shizun, marry yourself to me."

Shen Yuan gasped. "Wh-what? Why are you saying this?"

Why? Some hope blossomed in his heart. Yes, this he had experience with! There had been many times he'd had to convince a father to entrust his daughter to him. He was an emperor! There were many reasons to marry him that would make Shen Yuan understand he *needed* Binghe.

Binghe wanted Shen Yuan to need him as much as he needed Shen Yuan. "Shizun will never have to worry about money with this lord as his husband."

Shen Yuan pulled his hand away and picked the fan up off his lap where it had fallen. "I told you, you don't have to pay me back. My family has plenty of money."

Okay, okay, stupid place to start. Binghe faltered but continued with determination. "No one will dare attempt harm to Shen Yuan knowing his status as my spouse."

Shen Yuan side-eyed him, like Binghe was being ridiculous by offering him safety. "That's just straight up not true. Being married to you means jealous harem members trying to kill you, wife plots of being kidnapped for the emperor to save, protective armour falling apart at any second to reveal your body…"

As Shen Yuan went on and on about the various ways Binghe's wives had all experienced danger at some point or other, Binghe was starting to sweat.

"I can cure you," he said quietly.

Shen Yuan fluttered his fan. "Would that even work? Dual cultivation needs *cultivators.* "

That was true. Already, Luo Binghe's cultivation could only scratch the surface of Shen Yuan's health. Whether dual cultivation would make a difference was also a gamble.

"You could become a cultivator!"

"You destroyed every cultivation sect," Shen Yuan helpfully reminded him. "And I'm pretty sure I'm too old to learn anyway? I mean, there is that one plant that can create a core through papapa-" Shizun shook his head, then smacked him with his fan, revealing his flustered face for a moment. "Why are we even discussing this! We're not doing anything like that! Move on!"

With a clear neediness in his voice he aimed for Shen Yuan's biggest weakness. "If you marry me, I'll always cook for you!" A few people in surrounding seats (how long had they been eavesdropping!?) shot Binghe looks of disbelief. It didn't matter. If he had to become a desperate housewife begging a man to marry him, all that mattered was getting shizun to say yes!

"No, you won't," Shen Yuan stated bluntly.

Binghe didn't know how to respond to the matter-of-fact tone. "I won't…?"

"Always cook for me. You won't." Then he yawned. Yawned! As if this was such a boring topic! "How many women have you said that to, by the way?" Shizun's chin was rested on his hand, his elbow leaning on their seat's cup holder. "I know for a fact you've promised that to at least twenty of your wives, and considering you haven't seen any of them in months…"

But I really would, Binghe longed to cry out. *Only for you.*

It was a mercy he managed to keep the thought to himself. Luo Binghe was clearly an unreliable husband in shizun's eyes, and he'd *never* take Binghe seriously if he used the corny ' *but you're different* ' line.

Down to his last resort, Binghe gave Shen Yuan everything. He may not have had his harem anymore, but he still possessed his power, his kingdom, and his people. "I'll make you my empress!"

Shen Yuan raised a brow, and delivered the final blow. "Sounds like a lot of work."

Completely and utterly rejected, Binghe's lips wobbled miserably as he leaned back in his seat.

So that was that, then. Shen Yuan- the kind and loving shizun he'd always yearned for- saw zero reason to marry Binghe.

"Why is Binghe even insisting on something like that, anyway?" Shen Yuan asked. "You would gain nothing."

"...I like being with you," he admitted pathetically.

Shen Yuan stared at Binghe, wide-eyed and shocked. When he quickly covered his surprise with his fan, Binghe also glumly turned back to the movie. The couple on screen were now standing under a flower arch along with a man in black.

After some time, the man hesitantly spoke up again, though his voice was so soft, no one but a cultivator would be able to hear. "If Binghe feels that way, then… I'm not interested in men… but- ah, I mean, for *you*… "

The woman jumped into the man's arms as the scene reached its climax, and the two of them shared a passionate kiss. Of course…! How could Binghe forget his greatest asset? It wasn't his power as an emperor, or his cooking! It was his skill with a lover!

Luo Binghe turned back to Shen Yuan, cutting off whatever shizun was saying by cupping his face with lightning speed. Before Shen Yuan could figure out what was happening, Binghe had already mashed their mouths together.

If he'd been feeling nervous before, it was nothing compared to this moment. The second his lips met Shen Yuan's, Binghe's heart was thumping wildly in his chest. His palms felt wet with anxiety, and his brain had gone completely blank. The two of them had their eyes wide open–Binghe could see shizun's shock as much as he could feel his own.

He was… he was supposed to do something now. He was kissing Shen Yuan, but they only had their faces pushed together awkwardly, stuck frozen against each other. How did he kiss people in the past? Sha Hualing always liked it when Luo Binghe nibbled on her lip. Right, that's what he had to do!

Binghe had meant to nip gently. His nerves had his body wound up so tight, what was meant to be a teasing advance became a rough bite.

Shen Yuan's startled cry was hidden among the song that was suddenly blasting from the large screen. Shen Yuan pushed Binghe away the same moment Binghe tasted iron on his lips.

Shen Yuan covered his mouth with his hand, but they could both see the blood seeping through between his fingers. Shen Yuan's lip was bleeding!? Binghe's blood went cold as a heavy weight crashed into his chest.

He'd injured shizun! He finally had a kind, loving shizun, and he ruined it!

"This lord can fix it!" Binghe blurted in panic.

Shen Yuan shot him a dirty look before stomping out of their aisle and towards the exit. The demon was left frozen with shame and regret before he finally came to his senses and ran after him.

"Shizun!" Binghe followed the man out of the theatre. "Shizun, wait!"

How did this happen!? This was the one thing he was good at! He hadn't felt this inexperience and unskilled in… ever!

He caught up to Shen Yuan easily, but the small man was hellbent on ignoring his pleas for forgiveness. He strode past Binghe and down the street, into their shared apartment building.

The doorman raised an eyebrow at Shen Yuan's barely hidden gash and the desperate way Binghe chased after him, but didn't say anything as he opened the entrance.

When Shen Yuan had to stop to wait for the elevator, Binghe was nearly in tears. "Shizun, please! This disciple is sorry!"

Shen Yuan tried to wipe away the red fluid on his face, but only ended up smearing it across his cheek. Binghe shrank back under his furious gaze. "What the hell is your problem!?"

The elevator opened with a ding and they both stepped inside. Shizun smacked the button to their floor aggressively. "Shizun, it was an accident…"

"An accident!" Shen Yuan repeated. "What were you even trying to do!?"

He hadn't felt this humiliated since his days in the abyss… "I wanted… to…" Binghe mumbled.

"Speak up!"

Their elevator arrived in front of Shen Yuan's apartment, and he threw the door open as he stormed inside.

Binghe sniffled pathetically as he closed it behind him. "I was trying to kiss shizun…"

Shen Yuan had one hand on his bedroom doorknob, but at his confession, he turned around with a scowl. "You call that a kiss?"

"I didn't know what to do!"

" *You* didn't know what to do?" Shen Yuan's voice was (understandably) drenched in doubt.

Luo Binghe may have shared many kisses with beauties in the past, but he'd never felt this way before! "I've never…" Never been so deeply infatuated with one person? Luo Binghe blushed and chose a safer answer. "I've never kissed a man."

Shen Yuan was not appeased. "It's the same way you kiss a woman, Binghe!"

With all the sincerity Luo Binghe could muster, he delicately took his shizun's free hand, looking him right in the eye. "This disciple apologises. From now on, I will treat shizun like a woman."

He regretted his words the instant they left his lips. Why did he say that. *Why did he say that!?*

"Shizun-"

Shen Yuan’s door slammed shut on his face. That detested click of the lock followed right after.

“Break it and I’m kicking you out!” Shen Yuan shouted from the other side.

Binghe snuffed the fireball he’d summoned and sat down.

When he was still under Shen Qingqiu’s tutelage, Luo Binghe had no confidence in himself. He hung off his teacher’s every word in the hopes that it would make him someone powerful one day. He anguished over every small mistake, replaying his actions over and over in his mind to figure out what he’d done to invoke shizun’s wrath. He always felt lost and alienated from the happiness everyone else seemed to find so easily.

He'd promised himself he'd never let anyone make him feel that way again. Yet here he was, curled up in front of Shen Yuan's door like a pitiful dog. Luo Binghe hadn’t moved from where shizun had left him. It was late in the night by now, and shizun still hadn’t come out.

Luo Binghe considered trying his luck in the dream realm, but he didn’t want to risk being asleep if shizun left his room. So he stayed in place, sitting on the carpet with his knees tucked into his chest.

When Shen Yuan's door creaked open, Binghe perked up hopefully. "Shizun?" Shen Yuan was in his pajamas, and his bruised mouth had a sheen of medical balm spread across it. Binghe wilted in shame at the sight of what he'd done. “Shizun, I…”

“Binghe?” Shen Yuan kneeled in front of him and caressed his head gently. “Why are you on the floor?”

“Shizun…” Binghe nuzzled into the offered hand with relief. He sighed contently when Shen Yuan's palm cupped his cheek. “Shizun, forgive me. Please… don't hate me.”

"Oh, Binghe,” shizun whispered. He shifted the two of them until Binghe’s face was nestled into Shen Yuan’s chest in a tender embrace. The short man didn’t scold him off when Binghe’s arms wrapped around his waist, so Binghe squeezed tightly, enjoying the sensation of shizun’s hand soothingly stroking his head. “How could I ever hate you?”

“I didn’t want to hurt you,” Binghe said quietly. “Forgive me, shizun.”

“No, Binghe, it’s… I should apologize,” shizun mumbled. “My reaction was…” It looked like that was as far as his thin faced teacher could get. He cleared his throat and trailed off with a huff.

Those feelings of insecurity and regret may have been familiar, but Shen Qingqiu was nothing like this. His old shizun had never comforted him after leaving Binghe on the verge of tears, and he certainly never apologized for his actions. Not even in his final days.

So this was the difference. A kind shizun held him afterwards and eased that anxiety away. Binghe touched Shen Yuan’s face carefully, letting his thumb hover over the wound he’d left. When shizun didn’t pull away or scold him, Binghe swallowed nervously and let qi flow into the cut. “This is all I can do.”

When he finished, Shen Yuan licked his lip to feel his healed skin. Binghe’s heart fluttered as he watched that tongue rove over the rosy surface.

This close together, staring into each other’s eyes, Binghe felt that same clumsy panic he’d felt back at the theatre. Binghe broke their shared gaze and looked away, flustered.

“...Binghe.”

“Yes, shizun?”

“Close your eyes.”

Binghe obeyed without question. He could feel shizun's eyes on him, and waited patiently for the other to instruct him further.

He gasped when something touched his lips–something soft and warm. Shen Yuan's mouth pressed into his, and though Binghe desperately wanted to see, he didn't dare defy his shizun’s orders.

The kiss was the gentlest Luo Binghe had ever experienced. It was nothing like an enthusiastic harem member trying to steal his attention, or a demon’s aggressive displays of power. Shen Yuan moved delicately, more like a teasing brush against Binghe’s lips than something deeper. Each time shizun applied the smallest pressure into his skin, Binghe’s stomach felt unsteady, like a small boat out on a stormy ocean night. He could feel overwhelmed tears forming under his eyelids.

With his arms still around Shen Yuan, Binghe pulled his shizun closer, until the smaller man was hoisted onto his lap. When their chests pressed together, Shen Yuan released Binghe’s face and wound his arms around the demon’s neck. With the small distance between them eradicated, their kisses turned heavier. Shen Yuan sucked on Binghe’s lip experimentally, and when Binghe chased after it eagerly, he heightened the pressure until they were both moaning quietly.

“Settle down.” Goosebumps raised on his flesh when he felt Shen Yuan’s hot breath on his skin. "Don't bite, Binghe."

"Apologies, shizu-mhm…"

Shizun interrupted him with another kiss, one that Binghe returned happily. One hand left Shen Yuan's waist to trail upwards, into his short hair. Shizun hummed approvingly while Binghe ran his fingers through the fine strands, gasping provocatively when he used a fistful of hair to push shizun's face forward. Shen Yuan's whimpers were growing stronger with every kiss Binghe manhandled him into.

When Binghe attempted to lick inside Shen Yuan's mouth, the hands around his neck immediately moved to push at his chest instead. "Binghe! It's too early to do something like that!"

Shen Yuan shuffled backwards, right off his lap, and Luo Binghe finally opened his eyes. Shizun's cheeks were flushed red, and he couldn't even look in Binghe's direction. Binghe had done that. *Binghe* had put that arousing blush on shizun's face, and kissed his lips red. "Shizun, why did we stop?"

"You know how to… how to kiss a man now," Shen Yuan whispered. He still refused to look at Binghe, too ruffled up after everything that had just happened. "So, um. No more pouting-"

"Shizun." He was going to stop after giving Binghe such a small taste? His sight blurred with the water pooling near his tear ducts. It was shameful, but he was too preoccupied to care. "You're leaving me like this?"

Shen Yuan bit his lip bashfully, eyeing the refuge waiting behind his bedroom door once again. It seemed the thin faced man couldn't initiate any more than this, so Luo Binghe took the lead.

He moved closer, until their noses were nearly touching once again. "Shizun… this disciple needs more guidance."

Shen Yuan turned his face away, showing Binghe his pink ears instead. Binghe lips twitched up happily.

"Shizun, Binghe is still sad." Binghe leaned over to press a kiss against Shen Yuan's ear, enjoying the soft gasp that escaped the man.

"It- it's late," shizun stuttered. "We should- *um!"* When Binghe licked a stripe up Shen Yuan's helix, his teacher was forced to grab Binghe's arm and face him again. "Binghe!"

"Shizun can't be thinking of leaving me all alone," he whined. "Shizun, please, let me stay with you…"

Shen Yuan's body trembled with nerves as he considered it. Binghe held his breath as he waited for an answer.

At last, Shen Yuan whispered, "no funny stuff in my bed."

Binghe cried out happily and pounced on top of Shen Yuan, squeezing his small body giddily. "Shizun!"

"I mean it," Shen Yuan warned. "The second you try something, I'm kicking you out."

Binghe sighed and nuzzled into Shen Yuan's hair. "Shizun is so sexy when he-"

"Finish that sentence and you're sleeping alone." The energy between them had returned to normal already. "Come on, get off me so we can get up."

Luo Binghe jumped to his feet, pulling his shizun up along with him. Shen Yuan tried to suppress a smile, but Binghe could see the corner of his mouth lift up. He beamed back as he was led into the room.

Things were just a little different from the last time he'd been here. That plushie shizun had tried to hide now sat proudly on a small shelf hanging from the wall. The large cat he'd won at the carnival was lazing on the bed. "Shizun likes it," Binghe commented gleefully.

Shen Yuan picked it up and shoved it into a chair. "Shut up. You get to bed."

Shizun ignored Binghe's confused whines as he entered the bathroom. Luo Binghe waited a good ten seconds, like the filial student he was, before deciding it had been long enough. "Shizun?" Binghe opened the door.

Shen Yuan glowered at him before spitting out some foam into the sink. "Can I not even brush my teeth!?"

"Shizuuuun," Binghe groaned. He shuffled over to Shen Yuan and engulfed him in a hug from behind. "You said I could stay with you-"

"Not in the bathroom!"

"Shizuuun!"

Too tired to argue, Shen Yuan just snapped, "ugh, fine!"

Luo Binghe beamed at his shizun's approval, encircling his arms around the man's waist tightly. He cuddled into his teacher with contentment he hadn't felt in a long time.

Above the sink was the medicine cabinet, and reflected in the mirror were the two of them: Shen Yuan's foaming mouth as he brushed his teeth, and Luo Binghe completely wrapped around him with red, still wet eyes. Luo Binghe looked at himself, at the crybaby he'd become, who didn't have a single wife anymore. Clinging to his shizun, with Xin Mo abandoned until it had to be used. His thin faced yet indulging master, who gave him his home so the two of them could live together, and forgave him for every slight.

The mirror showed the two of them: an exact copy of those two he'd first met in that bamboo house when he began his journey to steal Shen Qingqiu.

"It's you," Binghe whispered. "It's you. It's been you the whole time." The tears he'd been holding back all night finally tipped over, streaming down his face. "Shizun, you… I found you…"

Chapter End Notes

AAAAND BINGMEIFICATION IS NOW AT 100%!!! next chapter binghe meets shen yuan's brother hehe

Chapter 6: my soul is now exposed

Chapter Notes

> hello lgbt community you may have noticed this fic no longer has the "major character death" tag! i won't trauma dump but basically the idea of writing a sick person dying has gone from an interesting plot idea to something that makes me deeply uncomfortable.
>
> TLDR: from here on this fic is gonna be 100% fluff . rip to all the foreshadowing
>
> cw for gun mention and shen yuan's canon desire to be dubconned

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Entering Shen Yuan's dreamscape was much easier this time, done almost unconsciously. Perhaps it was because Luo Binghe's demonic powers were growing stronger over time in this world, or maybe it was due to the physical distance between their bodies. Either way, shortly after Binghe closed his eyes in Shen Yuan's bed, he found himself in an entirely new setting.

The lavish hallway nearly reminded him of the old Huan Hua Palace, but much more tasteful. Rather than gaudy displays of wealth, the artfully scattered portraits and photos here looked almost homely under the chandelier.

Luo Binghe explored the massive mansion of shizun's memories until he met the dream's owner. A little boy stood in front of a thick oak door, fidgeting nervously before he knocked. His cheeks were chubbier, but those eyes undeniably belonged to Shen Yuan.

Someone shouted from inside, "What!?"

This young image of shizun opened the door slowly, peeking inside. It was dimly lit with a single bedside lamp, and there was a teenage boy sitting on a large bed. The resemblance assured Binghe that was Shen Yuan's brother, and the large room full of luxurious furniture gave a clear image of their upbringing.

"Ge, can I sleep here tonight?" Shen Yuan asked quietly.

The one inside looked to be less than a handful of years older–this must have been Shen Yuan's *er-ge* , Shen Ming.

"Who the hell would want you?" Shen Ming snorted. "You smell like a damn hospital. Get out of here."

Shen Yuan's face fell but he only replied, "okay."

“What do you mean, okay!?” The other boy jumped off the bed, stalking up to Shen Yuan. His shizun winced when Shen Ming seized his collar. “You’re such a fucking pushover, this is why you’re being bullied!”

Luo Binghe’s incorporeal form bristled at the treatment, but this small Shen Yuan was more perplexed than offended. He blinked up with big, confused and *adorable* eyes, and Luo Binghe didn’t understand how someone could look at them and not melt to the floor. "I… I'm not being bullied."

“Don’t lie to me, Shen Yuan!” Shen Ming shouted. “Come on, curse me out instead of taking everything I say!” He gave his little brother a small push, like he was edging him on.

"Oh," Shen Yuan exclaimed. He smacked away an incoming jab and said, "fuck you."

“That’s right,” Shen Ming replied with pride. “If someone is mean to, next you call them a bitch.” When Shen Yuan frowned, he grabbed him by the shoulders and shook the small boy. “Come on, do it, coward!”

Shen Yuan’s head bobbed as he was jerked back and forth. “You’re a bitch!” He wailed.

“Good!” There was a clear sigh of relief when Shen Ming released his brother. “Now tell me to kill myself."

"I'm not doing that."

"Pussy."

"I don't want you to die."

"I don't want you to die either.” The teenager was so loud and boisterous a moment ago, it was difficult to believe the soft and vulnerable words were coming from the same person. Shen Ming kneeled down in front of Shen Yuan and took his hand softly. “It’s my job to protect you. That's why you have to tell me when someone threatens you, okay?”

Shen Yuan groaned in frustration. "Okay, seriously, who do you think is bullying me?"

“You’re still going to play dumb?” Shen Ming narrowed his eyes. “I saw you and that girl on Saturday. She was looking at you and going...” He traced a line across his neck with his finger, gesturing a threat. “And other stuff like that.”

Shen Yuan's jaw dropped open and he screeched, "you fucking idiot!"

" *Shen Yuan* !"

"That was the chef's daughter!" Shen Yuan exclaimed. "She's *deaf!* She was teaching me how to sign!”

There was a long and awkward silence in the bedroom. Shen Ming stared at Shen Yuan blankly before exclaiming, “ah.” When he pushed himself back onto two feet, Shen Ming’s face was turning pink with embarrassment.

“You're so stupid!” Shen Yuan cried.

“Do you want to die!?”

"The only person threatening me is *you!"*

"Shut up!" The older boy stomped back to his bed, throwing the covers over himself and turning his back to his brother. "Get the hell out of here already!"

Shen Yuan stood in place, shifting from one foot to the other with unease. “So… I can't stay?"

His brother grumbled under his breath, but ultimately lifted his blanket to allow the younger boy access. Shen Yuan closed the door behind him and burrowed into the bed.

“No kicking,” Shen Ming grouched.

“You’re the one who kicks,” shizun retorted.

As their bickering picked up again, the dream faded away.

It was a beautiful morning. The sun was shining in through the gap in Shen Yuan’s curtain, revealing a perfectly blue and cloudless sky. The open window blew in the fresh scent of Spring air. Birds were chirping, but quiet enough not to stir the sleeping man at Binghe’s side.

That was the best part of all: Luo Binghe had opened his eyes to find shizun’s face half-hidden into Binghe’s chest. His fists loosely clung to Binghe’s robe, even when Binghe’s arm was slung across his waist to keep that warm weight pressed up against him. The demon giggled and kissed the top of Shen Yuan’s head. “Don’t worry shizun, I’m right here.”

Shen Yuan was the Shen Qingqiu he’d been looking for. He wasn’t sure how, but he knew it to be a fact.

Luo Binghe tucked a lock of hair out of the sleeping man’s face adoringly. Actually, no. Shen Yuan was a hundred times more beautiful and lovely than any Shen Qingqiu that could possibly exist. His shizun was the best, without rival.

His shizun. Luo Binghe’s grin was spread so wide, his cheeks hurt. He had a shizun that kissed his worries away and kindly taught him about the world with a smile. It had taken a long time, but it had been worth the wait. He melted back into his teacher’s body.

This early in the morning, Luo Binghe was already faced with a truly difficult decision: should he stay in bed and continue cuddling shizun, or get up and cook them breakfast?

When Binghe shifted slightly, Shen Yuan whined softly in his sleep and nuzzled closer. So cute! Too cute! Binghe squeezed the small man as he squealed, “my Yuan-ge is so perfect!”

Shizun’s deep breathing finally changed into something more present. Overcome with adoration, Binghe pressed a chaste kiss to shizun’s lips. “Good morning, shizun!” Binghe whispered into his lips. Shen Yuan didn't do anything but groan, so Binghe peppered kisses across his cheek. “Shizuuun~!”

“Ah… morning…” Shen Yuan blinked at him slowly, like a lazy cat. The sight was enough to rile up a treasure trove of energy under his skin; Luo Binghe had to restrain himself from jumping onto the adorable man and kissing him senseless.

“Binghe…”

“Would shizun like to sleep some more?”

Shizun’s hum was lighter this time, like he approved of the idea. “Mhm.”

“Then shizun should rest.”

Shen Yuan perched his head atop Binghe's pectoral, nuzzling into his chest contently. There was so much affection bubbling inside Luo Binghe, he felt like it would explode and tear apart his body for daring to hold all of it.

They stayed that way for about ten seconds before Shen Yuan’s eyes flew open, and he leapt away from his bedmate. “What the hell!?”

“Shizun?”

The covers were tossed back, and Shen Yuan stared at Luo Binghe from a distance. “Why-!”

Why was shizun so far away all of a sudden…? Binghe whined, “Shizun, come back…”

Shizun continued to gape at Luo Binghe with shock until a bright red blush overtook his features. “You… last night…” Shen Yuan tore his eyes away, staring off into a corner of the room. “I-I thought that was a dream…”

“Of course not, shizun!” Binghe chirped happily. “This Binghe was in your dream, and you definitely did not dream of that!”

“You were in my dream?” Shen Yuan whispered.

So early in the morning, and shizun was already so energetic! Binghe beamed and caught up to where shizun was sprawled on the other side of the bed. “Shizun, allow this disciple…” Shen Yuan yelped, but ultimately did not object when Luo Binghe heaved Shen Yuan’s body into his arms. Shizun’s hands clutched Binghe’s robe weakly, allowing himself to be carried to the living room like a bride.

A bride… Binghe could have fainted from joy at the thought.

Binghe deposited shizun onto the couch with several parting kisses before starting on breakfast. Tea with a rind of orange peel for maximum flavour, waffles with a special glaze that wouldn't soak the texture, fruit salad, chocolate stuffed croissants, the tray was filled with delicious foods for shizun to wake up to! Binghe placed it on the coffee table in front of the sofa, drinking in Shen Yuan's dazed expression with delight. "Binghe-"

"Say ahh, shizun!" Binghe stuffed a croquette into shizun's mouth, watching him gasp and gulp it down. "How was it?"

Shizun cleared his throat. "Uh, delicious, but Binghe-"

Binghe picked up the cheesy tart next. "Try this too, shizun!"

Shen Yuan's stupor cleared, and he dodged the pastry coming towards him. "Binghe, listen to me. I…" He eyed the tray with newfound interest. "How did you even make all of this so fast?"

Binghe set down the food, slipping his arm around Shen Yuan's waist to pull him in for a kiss. It was a simple press of lips together, but shizun squealed in surprise nonetheless. Looking into Shen Yuan's eyes, Binghe whispered, "Being with shizun gives this lowly one the strength to do anything…"

"Hmph." Shizun bashfully glanced back to his breakfast. "At least have some with me."

After breakfast, shizun changed out of his pajamas, ignoring Binghe's pitiful cries from outside his bedroom begging to let him watch. They wound up right back on the couch, this time with Luo Binghe laying against the pillows while his shizun sat on his lap.

"Gentler," Shen Yuan whispered. Luo Binghe shivered with arousal, trying to calm himself down–a feat easier said than done when his shizun was letting him lap away at his mouth.

Their 'kissing lessons' picked up right where they'd left off the night before. The warmth and weight of Shen Yuan atop of him was so heavenly, Luo Binghe was in a dreamlike daze while they explored each other's mouths.

Sometimes, though, that lovely lovestruck feeling was taken over by his thoughts.

Being in Shen Yuan's company left Luo Binghe feeling nervous and insecure in ways he hadn't felt in a long time. Even when he'd lain with a woman for the first time ever, he'd been more self-assured; after all, no matter how badly he performed, Qin Wanyue was happy just to have her dying wish granted–and then he'd cured her, as the popped cherry on top.

This time, there was no emergency forcing the two of them together. Shen Yuan had nothing to gain by trusting Luo Binghe with his body, after giving Binghe knowledge and shelter in

this strange new world and asking nothing in return. Could he really take, and give nothing in return?

"Shizun," Binghe murmured against Shen Yuan's lips, "is it really okay to do this?"

Shen Yuan's previously relaxed body stiffened against him. He pulled back to look down at Binghe with wide eyes before his face flushed red. "You're the one who-"

Shen Yuan hastily jumped off and walked away, leaving Binghe bewildered by the sudden change. The now empty space atop him felt so cold. “Shizun? Where are you going?”

Shizun paced across the room with his arms crossed. "You should have told me earlier if you didn't want to…!"

“Didn’t want to?” Binghe parrotted.

Shen Yuan made a beeline for his bedroom door. Binghe knew he was about to employ that detested lock to separate them again, so he bound off his seat and took his shizun by the waist.

“Shizun, wait,” he pleaded. “Don't leave! I'm sorry!” He slowly turned Shen Yuan around to face him again, pressing soft kisses down his cheek. “Why is shizun leaving…?” Shizun gasped when Binghe nosed at his neck. “Let this disciple make shizun feel good… please.”

Shen Yuan closed his eyes. “Do you have to call me that right now? It's weird.”

“I think shizun likes it.”

Neither of them heard the front door open.

“Who would like something like this!” Shen Yuan insisted.

Binghe meant to lead them back onto the couch, but a roll in the carpet had other plans. Shen Yuan tripped, pulling Binghe down with him. Binghe covered the back of shizun's head with his hand, preventing any serious injuries.

He'd ended up straddling Shen Yuan, their faces close. Taking advantage of their new position, Binghe grabbed two handfuls of his undefined chest and squeezed, playfully massaging the skin.

“Ah!” Shen Yuan half heartedly struggled under him, too thin faced to just let himself be held down. “Stop…”

“Does shizun really want me to stop?” Luo Binghe nuzzled into the man’s neck, grinning when Shen Yuan shivered in anticipation. “Mhm, I don’t think shizun wants this disciple to-”

His words were cut off when something made contact with his side, sending him spinning off of Shen Yuan. Luo Binghe groaned and clutched his obliques as he sat up. It wasn’t the most pain he’d endured, not by a long shot, but it was unexpected enough to leave him disoriented.

Where he was a moment ago, there was now a man with crew cut hair shaking Shen Yuan by the shoulders. “What did he do to you!? A-Yuan! Talk to me!”

“Ge?” Shen Yuan said incredulously. “Why are you here?”

Upon examination, the man in their shared apartment looked similar to the Shen Ming he’d seen in shizun’s dream. “That’s right, ge is here.” Shen Ming grabbed a yellow stuffed toy from a nearby shelf and thrust it towards his brother. “Show me on this doll where he touched you.”

Shen Yuan took the plush in hand. “What am I supposed to do with this? I'm not molesting my Pikachu for you.”

Luo Binghe joined them from where he’d been kicked. Shizun had warned him against speaking about cultivation in this world, so he hid his huadian and said, “Yuan-ge?”

Shen Ming pulled his brother into his chest, guarding him. “Your doorman called me last night. He said you came home with a split lip.” The way Shen Ming shook with fury at the sight of Binghe… ah. Now the sudden intrusion made sense.

Shen Yuan’s face reddened as he pushed the older man off himself. “It's not like that…!”

Shen Ming clearly wasn’t interested in hearing about Luo Binghe’s failed attempts at kissing. He pointed a metal item at him, holding the unknown object securely with both hands.

Oh, shizun had told him about it once: it was a human weapon called a gun.

Within a second, Binghe was facing Shen Yuan's back. The smaller man held his arms out protectively in front of the demon lord. “What the hell are you doing! Is that real!?”

One hand pulled back the gun's slide until a clicking sound was heard. “Move out the way, A-Yuan, ge has to take care of something.”

“Are you fucking insane!? Where did you even get that!”

With Luo Binghe’s cultivation, he could remove Shen Ming’s entire arm before he could fire his weapon. But Shen Yuan had already put himself in danger to protect Binghe, forgetting that a heavenly demon would not be killed by a human bullet.

He remembered the loving way Shen Qingqiu held that other Luo Binghe, how he'd protected his disciple at the risk of his own life. Binghe had seethed for weeks, furiously wondering why another version of himself was blessed with something he'd always longed for. And now…

Overcome with emotion, he threw his arms around Shen Yuan from behind and burrowed his face into his neck. “Shizun…!”

“Don't hide behind my brother, you damn coward!” Shen Ming roared.

There were two ways he could go about this. One, he could show his newest obstacle a sliver of his destructive power. Two, he could play the damsel. Luo Binghe had always picked the first, but he knew better now.

“Shizun.” Binghe tugged at Shen Yuan’s shirt, fluttering his lashes at the man when he glanced back over his shoulder. “That big mean stranger over there is scaring Binghe…”

Shizun gasped, forgetting Shen Ming altogether and turning around to embrace Binghe comfortingly. “Oh, Binghe… I'm sorry about my brother.”

Binghe cuddled into shizun’s chest happily, pampered in soothing headpats. “Binghe is so lucky shizun is here to protect him!”

Their poor home intruder was left ignored while they snuggled. Shen Ming wailed, “Shen Yuan, you can't honestly believe this shit! He needs you to protect him? He's twice your size!”

Shizun stroked Binghe's hair. “He may be big, but Binghe has a maiden's tender heart!”

Uh… sure. Whatever shizun had to believe to keep patting his head.

“Look, this is all a misunderstanding,” Shen Yuan explained. “Binghe didn’t mean to hurt me, he just got too excited while we…” Shizun’s words trailed off. Luo Binghe curiously glanced at him and found shizun’s face heating up. “While we…”

“Shizun? Why aren't you telling him it was during our kiss-”

Shen Yuan pulled off Binghe with haste, slapping his hands over his mouth. “That’s not…” Shizun’s eyes flashed back to his brother. “I’m not…” In an effort to save his thin face, he changed topics: “Can you put that thing away already!? You’ve seriously gone too far this time!”

Shen Ming grumbled, but flipped a small switch on the gun and placed it on the coffee table. Luo Binghe saw that familiar expression of shame he’d seen in shizun’s dream. “I’m just trying to keep you safe, and you’re siding with him…”

“There is nothing safe about bringing a literal killing machine into my house, idiot!” Shen Yuan snapped back.

Even though the threat had been put away, Binghe pretended to sniffle. “But shizun, I’m still scared!”

Shen Yuan gave him an unimpressed scowl. “I’ve indulged you enough. Don’t push it.”

Damnit!

“Fine!” Shen Ming pushed his sleeves to his elbows, staring Binghe down. “You want to do this without weapons? You, me. Fight to the death!”

“No,” Shen Yuan said simply.

“Fight until one of us gives up!” Shen Ming corrected.

Binghe waited for shizun to scold the man off, but Shen Yuan just closed his eyes and sighed. “If Binghe beats you, will you drop this?”

If? As if Binghe would be defeated by some mortal, especially when his future with shizun was at stake! Besides, it wasn’t the first time he’d been challenged to a duel to prove his worthiness for a wife… “I accept!”

Shen Ming threw the door open. “Let’s go, then! One on one, man to man!”

After a healthy amount of bantering, Shen Ming raced outside, telling the two of them to follow him to a nearby park. Luo Binghe would have run after him if not for shizun holding him back.

“Listen… Can you go easy on him?” Shen Yuan whispered. “I know he's being really stupid right now, and when I was younger, I used to find it ridiculous, but… then we had meimei and I became an older brother too, and I was like, okay I understand now.”

“Of course,” Binghe promised. “I won’t cause permanent harm to Shen Yuan’s family.”

Shizun smiled, tired and small but still infinitely beautiful. “Thank you.”

He leaned closer. “Will shizun give this disciple a kiss for good luck?”

Shen Yuan turned his face away from Binghe’s expectant lips. “Since when does a heavenly demon need luck?”

Luo Binghe wondered whether it would be counterproductive to beg; Shen Yuan usually liked that needy side of him, but he’d already been given a warning about acting out for shizun’s attention.

He didn’t need to worry–before he could even make up his mind, Shen Yuan had already slipped out of his hold. “After,” he stated. Shizun shyly avoided Luo Binghe’s gaze. “Binghe can get a kiss after.”

Luo Binghe and Shen Ming stood ten paces apart, staring their enemy down. The sun was bright, almost sweltering, matching the heated atmosphere. It was early in the day, and with the children all in school, they had the wide space all to themselves for their fight.

Shen Ming cracked his knuckles with a cocky smirk. “You think I’m going to lose to some cosplayer?”

Luo Binghe preferred his world's robes when he was lounging with Shen Yuan… Shen Ming had barged in so suddenly, Binghe barely had time to hide his demon mark, much less

change.

“Yuan-ge!” Binghe called to his lover, “Cheer for me!”

Shen Yuan was sitting on a dusty wooden bench with his legs crossed, scrolling through his phone. “Uh huh,” he replied without looking up.

“Gege!” Binghe whined again.

Shizun sighed, looked up, and said flatly, “go Binghe. You can do it. Yay.” His eyes dropped back to his phone screen. “Just get this over with.”

Shen Yuan may have asked Binghe to go easy on his opponent, but he wouldn’t just give away the right to stay by shizun’s side! If this was the trial he had to face in order to win his brother’s approval for their union, then he was going to win no matter what!

“Three… two… one…”

Binghe readied himself in position to strike while Shen Ming counted down.

“...go-”

The second the word escaped Shen Ming’s mouth, a swift strike from Binghe sent him flying back. Shen Ming’s back hit a tree trunk loud enough for shizun to look up from his phone with a frown.

Binghe rounded on his new victim, looking down at the confused man. Surely, he was extremely fit for a human–but only a fool would go up against a heavenly demon. He prepared to end the battle and-

“Luo Binghe!”

Binghe’s fist paused mid-air. He turned away from Shen Ming and looked back towards the bench, where his shizun had his arms crossed with an unhappy expression. Luo Binghe abandoned the fight and joined shizun’s side, looking up at him demurely. “Yes? You called?”

“Binghe.” Shizun’s face was painted with a beautifully stern expression that… Binghe was *really* into. “Are you trying to make your shizun angry?”

“No!” Binghe cried out. He latched onto Shen Yuan’s arm, pouting as pathetically as he could. “Shizun, I only-”

Shen Yuan placed a delicate finger on Binghe’s lips, effectively silencing him. “A good boy wouldn’t show off. You already won, so call the end of the fight.”

Indeed, although Shen Ming had managed to stand while they talked, he was clearly in no position to fight any longer. He held one limp arm in shock, as if he couldn’t even process what had happened–which wasn’t surprising, considering how fast the demon could move.

Luo Binghe hung his head. “Deepest apologies, shizun…”

Shen Ming watched the tall former emperor flutter his teary lashes, leaning into his little brother's hand when Shen Yuan gave him a reassuring head pat. He understood at that moment: Shen Yuan was not in danger whatsoever.

"I don't know what's going on with you and that guy," Shen Ming said, "but I can see you have it under control." His face twisted in disgust when he took in the way Luo Binghe clung onto his brother. "I also see now that I want *nothing* to do with it."

He turned his back to the pair and walked away.

"Mom said to call her!" Was the only thing Shen Ming said as he left them.

Binghe snuggled into Shen Yuan's shoulder. "Does this mean I have your brother's blessing?"

"What do you mean blessing?" Shen Yuan smacked Binghe's head. After a moment, he answered, "yeah, that's pretty much what it means."

Luo Binghe pouted from his seat on the sofa, watching Shen Yuan get ready. "Shizun-"

"No," Shen Yuan answered immediately.

Shizun was back to that beautifully crafted persona he played for the general public. Hidden under makeup and tailored suits once again, Shen Yuan was prepared for a night among his colleagues. Luo Binghe was not invited.

"It's only a few hours, Binghe." Shizun stroked Binghe's hair lovingly. "I swear, it's really boring."

"But I want to be bored with you," he insisted.

Shen Yuan rolled his eyes with a smile and drew his hand back. "I need you to watch the house, okay?"

Getting mollified with such a terrible excuse! "Yuan-ge!" Binghe cried.

Shizun slipped out the door before he could be convinced otherwise. "Okay, see you soon!"

Luo Binghe grumbled as he pulled his knees to his chest, sulking alone in the apartment. With his blood inside Shen Yuan's body, he could physically feel shizun moving farther and farther away… Shizun looked so beautiful tonight, too. He'd had a brand new suit tailored just for the event, and another for Binghe while they were at the shop-

Binghe bounced to his feet in excitement.

The ‘security’ at this gathering was a joke, though Binghe reminded himself there were no demons for them to be on guard against in this world. Easily sneaking past the gate, Binghe checked his appearance one last time in a grand hallway mirror. He’d given up on the tie that came with his suit, but a quick internet search told him it was acceptable to forgo an accessory or two. Even Luo Binghe considered his outfit a pleasant change of pace from this world’s style–his blazer and trousers covered every inch, and the weight of multiple layers was comforting.

It was late enough in the light for the chandeliers to reflect off glass windows blindingly. Binghe moved along the corridor, closer to where his blood parasites were calling for him.

The ballroom was as opulent as Luo Binghe had come to expect, but neither the orchestra nor the buffet were near as eye-catching as Shen Yuan. Binghe beamed and ran to the man. “Yuan-ge!”

Shen Yuan gasped. Without glasses hiding his eyes, they looked impossibly large when they widened at the sight of him. “Binghe?”

Binghe leapt at him, enveloping Shen Yuan with his arms. “Surprise!”

Shizun flailed, struggling to keep the drink in his hand from spilling. Binghe could smell the alcohol, and knew that shizun had no intention of drinking it anyway. He whined when Shen Yuan pushed him away. “Binghe.” He glanced to his right and back. “I had no idea you’d be joining us.”

Luo Binghe followed his line of sight, finally looking away from his shizun long enough to take in the woman at his side. She wore a tight-fitting blue dress and an entertained grin. She held her hand out and drawled, “A pleasure to make your acquaintance.”

“The pleasure is mine,” Binghe answered goodnaturedly. He raised the hand to his lips, pressing a soft kiss to her knuckle. The lady giggled, amused, and Binghe glanced back to see his shizun’s approval. Instead he found Shen Yuan's already forced smile looking even more rigid than before.

“Excuse us.” Shen Yuan hooked his arm with Binghe’s to drag him off. Or rather, he pulled at Binghe, and the bigger man allowed himself to be led away from the rest of the attendees.

Shizun pushed him through one of two matching doors, into a narrow room with washbasins and mirrors. The bathroom of this establishment, it seemed.

Shen Yuan turned with a scowl. “What are you doing here-”

Binghe cut him off with a kiss.

Luo Binghe’s large hands held Shen Yuan’s face while he smashed their mouths together. Shizun latched onto Binghe’s lapels in surprise. With every kiss, Shen Yuan's grip eased, and his beautiful lashes fluttered as he closed his eyes. Binghe watched shizun melt into him with the utmost reverence.

Luo Binghe focused his efforts, invading Shen Yuan's mouth with his tongue. The small man in his hold moaned, his breath getting heavier and heavier with each sloppy kiss. By the time Binghe finally gave his master a break, Shen Yuan was panting heavily into his mouth.

Damn. He'd hoped to mess up shizun’s makeup, but it was still firmly in place.

“Binghe!” Shizun hissed. “I told you to stay home!”

Binghe pouted, resting his cheek on Shen Yuan’s shoulder so he could look up through his lashes. “How could shizun leave me behind all alone…?”

Shen Yuan's irritated expression did not warm into his usual comforting smile like Binghe expected. The short man kept his chin up, glowering at him.

Luo Binghe wisely released him and took a step back. “Is shizun dissatisfied with this disciple…?”

“I've told you this before, Binghe, you can’t have a harem in this world,” Shen Yuan said seriously. “If you come as my plus-one to pick up women, it'll make us both look bad.”

…Binghe knew that. That was why he’d divorced all his wives, so Shen Yuan would be his only spouse- *oh.* He’d forgotten to tell shizun he’d done that. “Actually, this one-”

Shen Yuan slapped a hand over Binghe’s mouth, silencing him. With a soft *“fuck”* under his breath, he shoved Binghe into one of the cubicles. Once the two of them were hidden, he fastened the small lock.

Shiuzn’s eyes were glued to the stall door, and Luo Binghe could hear his breathing hasten when two voices walked into the bathroom.

Binghe pressed a gentle kiss to shizun’s hand before lifting it off his mouth. “Shizun, why are we hiding?”

Shen Yuan whispered, “I don't want you saying anything weird here.”

The stall was low enough to hide the guest's shoes, but they could both hear footsteps come to a stop nearby. The tap was turned on – one of them was cursing out a stain while another laughed.

Shizun’s attention was stolen by the party on the other side of the door. It was easy to wrap his arms around Shen Yuan’s waist and pull him closer, until Shen Yuan's back was pressed into Binghe's chest.

The smaller man practically jumped in place. “Binghe-!”

He leaned down, whispering directly into Shen Yuan's ear. "Quiet, shizun." Shen Yuan trembled at the hot air against his skin. "We don't want them to find us like this."

Shen Yuan steadied himself by placing his palms flat against the door. He gasped as Binghe rolled his hips, grinding his quickly hardening cock against his shizun's ass. "Binghe…!"

The tap water stopped, though the men continued to linger and converse. One of Binghe's hands trailed down slowly until it reached between his legs. The other groped upwards until it reached shizun's collar and began unbuttoning his shirt.

"Binghe," Shen Yuan warned, "we need to go back out there."

Luo Binghe had no plans to release him, but he played along. "Of course."

"You'll wrinkle our clothes, everyone will know-"

"Know what, shizun?" Binghe teased Shen Yuan's snowy neck with kisses. "Will they know your disciple undressed you in the bathroom?"

Shen Yuan gasped, then pulled away one hand from the door to cover his mouth.

Luo Binghe dragged his tongue up Shen Yuan's neck. Unable to resist teasing his lover, Binghe softly blew on the wet skin, watching shizun shiver in his arms. He could feel Shen Yuan grow as he continued to palm shizun's crotch. "Shizun is getting hard…"

"And the sky is blue!" Shen Yuan snapped. "If we're all just narrating everything!"

The footsteps from before had already finished whatever business they came in for – a second after they exited the bathroom, Shen Yuan was turning on him furiously. "You- gah!"

Binghe lifted his shizun, dropping him atop the closed toilet seat. Towering over him, he could see his blazer and half-unbuttoned shirt slipping off his shoulders, barely covering his chest. Bringing his eyes down, he found the small tent in Shen Yuan's pants.

Why did shizun insist on denying himself when he so clearly wanted Binghe? But it was also cute, how Shen Yuan played the role of a pure maiden refusing the demon. Binghe could indulge his teacher's thin face.

"Shizun," Binghe breathed out. His knees hit the floor, and suddenly he felt like a little boy again, kneeling in front of his shizun and hoping for praise. He smiled as he unzipped Shen Yuan's trousers. This time, he had a shizun who would appreciate his efforts.

Shen Yuan was frozen, staring at him with eyes wide in shock. He gasped when Binghe pulled down his underwear completely, revealing his cock.

Shizun's pillar, if Binghe had to describe it, was just like him – small and pretty. Any hair near the base has been trimmed, and its honey peach colour tapered off into a sweet pink.

"Stop staring!" Shen Yuan yelped. He pressed his thighs together to hide himself, but all it did was make him look like a nervous virgin. Luo Binghe was drooling by the time shizun

asked, “What are you thinking? I'm a man!”

Binghe spread the milky legs once more, inching his face closer to the twitching head. “Yes, I can see that, shizun…”

Shen Yuan couldn’t come up with a snappy retort before Binghe was tentatively licking at the slit experimentally.

Luo Binghe had never done this with another man, so he was surprised to find it didn’t taste too much different from the rest of shizun’s body. Skin was skin, he supposed.

Shizun’s chest was rising and falling rapidly with each harried breath. “Binghe!”

At a moment like this, it was a blessing he was a demon. Binghe extended his tongue over his teeth and took the head into his mouth.

Shen Yuan threw his head back with a stifled moan. “Oh!”

Luo Binghe pulled off, nuzzling his face into the shaft. “Binghe is here, shizun,” he reassured before pulling his pillar back into his mouth.

Perhaps it was due to inexperience, or maybe shizun was just that sensitive – either way, the man was moaning with every lick and suck. Luo Binghe was the one on his knees pleasing his master, but it was Shen Yuan falling apart under his administrations… it was unexpectedly enjoyable. Binghe’s own cock was painfully hard under his clothes, but he didn’t dare take it in hand. He was completely focused on the task at hand.

“Stop it…” Shen Yuan whispered. Despite his words, shizun’s hand gripped locks of Binghe’s hair, keeping him in place. Binghe’s chest felt warm with fondness as his tongue played with shizun’s glans.

“Shen Yuan?”

Shen Yuan froze still under Luo Binghe, his breath catching in alarm. Oh, things were just getting better and better.

So caught up with their current activity, neither of them had heard someone new enter the bathroom – and it was none other than shizun’s little admirer.

“Are you in here?” Wen Guo called out.

Shen Yuan glanced at him in betrayal when Binghe continued tonguing at his dick.

“I'm here!” Shizun squeaked out. “What, ah, what's wrong?”

Shizun pulled on Binghe’s hair, half heartedly trying to pry him off. He moaned around Shen Yuan, feeling a shiver down his spine in response.

“You've been in there a while.”

So he'd been waiting this entire time for Shen Yuan to return. Jealousy burned in Binghe's stomach, but was quickly overshadowed by satisfied glee. After all, Wen Guo could desire shizun all he wanted, but it was Luo Binghe was touching him right now.

Shen Yuan looked down with beautifully teary eyes. "Binghe, stop it…!"

"What?" Wen Guo called. "Speak up!"

"No, I wasn't talking to-"

Binghe bobbed his head before Shen Yuan could finish his sentence, swallowing up the small cock in its entirety.

Shen Yuan's back arched as his head fell to the side. " *Ungh! Ah!"*

"Shen Yuan!?"

Ah, the makeup hid shizun's blushing cheeks, but Binghe could still see his reddenning ears.

"I'm fine!" Shizun insisted. It sounded completely unconvincing with his strangled, breathy voice. "I'm- unh, playing games!"

There was a long pause before Wen Guo tsk'd. "How many times have I told you, that's a bad habit…"

Shen Yuan's bare shoulders were blooming into a gorgeous rose shade. His eyes, usually so sharp and piercing, were dazed and wet as he looked down at Binghe absent-mindedly. "I'm okay, so…" He exhaled, trembling. "So you can… leave…"

Shizun's hips were swaying by now, slowly fucking into Binghe's mouth. He could hear little puffs of breath with each small thrust, and a small groan when Wen Guo spoke up again. "It's fine, I'll wait for you-"

Unable to hold on, Shen Yuan yelled, "Please just go away!"

Binghe was certain he would have laughed out loud if his mouth wasn't occupied. Shizun's friend stormed out, finally leaving the two of them alone together. Just in time, because Shen Yuan had hunched over, breathing frantically as he neared his climax.

"Ah… ah!" Shen Yuan screamed. "Oh god!"

Binghe squeezed Shen Yuan's soft thighs one final time as his shizun came in his mouth. He swallowed every last salty drop eagerly, only pulling off when shizun went soft.

Poor Shen Yuan. He looked completely wrung out, on the verge of tears as he struggled to even sit upright. Clearly too exhausted to even chew him out for his disrespect – he just stared at Binghe with a daze, breathing heavily as he came down from his high.

Maybe that vacant expression and panting was something to worry about… Luo Binghe reached into the qiankun pouch in his trouser pocket, pulling out Shen Yuan's extra inhaler.

He held it up to shizun's face. “Does shizun need this?”

A spark of recognition finally lit up in Shen Yuan's eyes. Shizun blinked, staring at the inhaler as if trying to discern whether it was a mirage. “Why do you have this?”

“For moments like these,” Binghe answered. “You're okay?”

He nodded, looking no less awestruck as Binghe returned it to the pouch. “I… I thought you wanted to study it,” Shen Yuan admitted softly. “Or take it home for one of your wives.”

Binghe pouted. “It belongs to shizun.” He opened the qiankun bag. “I also have shizun’s nasal spray, painkillers, medical bracelet…”

By the time Binghe glanced back from his pouch, Shen Yuan’s smile had become a bit wobbly.

“Fine, fine. Let's go home.” Shen Yuan mumbled. He leaned his head on Binghe’s shoulder. When Binghe quickly scooped Shen Yuan up in his arms, he allowed his body to relax. “I need to apologise to Wen Guo, but I suppose I can just text him.”

Binghe nuzzled into shizun’s hair. “Delete his number, gege.”

“Unbelievable,” Shen Yuan muttered. “Making demands when I'm angry with you.”

Binghe snuck a peek at shizun’s face. When he caught the expression on his teacher’s face, Luo Binghe's chest squeezed tightly. Shen Yuan had a soft smile on his lips, his gorgeous eyes half-lidded with affection and contentment as he looked up at Luo Binghe.

Binghe blinked back his tears. Just for now, at least… those tears would help him once they got back home. So caught up in pleasing shizun, his long-neglected cock was hard and pent up. Binghe subtly pressed it against Shen Yuan's hip.

If Luo Binghe needed any confirmation Shen Yuan hadn’t objected to their previous activities, it was here. Once he felt Binghe's pillar at full size, shizun flailed desperately in an attempt to escape. “No way! Absolutely not! You better keep that thing away from me!!”

Chapter End Notes

next chapter we meet da-ge...

also I WANTED TO ASK YOU GUYS ... if i made a social media just for my writing/silly thoughts would you guys follow it.. and if so which app would be best 👀

Chapter 7: this soon shall pass

Chapter Notes

> first of all, thank you to everyone who commented on my last chapter when i asked what social media i make! tumblr was the most popular choice (plus twitters gone to shit since musky took over) so you can hear me ramble about shizun over here!
>
> secondly thank you to @blockydonuts so much to for this art... ilysm
>
> last but not least, CW FOR THIS CHAPTER.. physical illness, unsanitary, medical caretaking.. you can check the end notes for more

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Drifting into Shen Yuan's dreams was second nature by now. Perhaps it was due to their physical intimacy, or perhaps shizun was unconsciously less guarded around Binghe. Either way, he looked forward to exploring his teacher's mind when he was able.

The Shen family's estate had become familiar to him after all these dreams, despite him never stepping foot in the house. Luo Binghe wound through the shining halls and towards the source of the two voices, and found shizun with a familiar face.

This memory must have taken place recently; Shen Yuan's hair was only a fraction shorter than his real self. The man sitting across the table from him must have been Shen An, Shen Yuan's oldest brother.

Shizun's voice was loud and clear – clearly, he'd practiced this. "I want to live alone."

His brother glanced up from his newspaper distractedly. "What was that?"

"I want to move out," Shen Yuan repeated.

Shen An froze in place. "Haha… ha… a-Yuan, ge seems to be hearing things-"

"I found a pretty nice place about half an hour's drive from here," he continued nonchalantly. "The apartment has nice security, and it's within walking distance of a lot of shops. I already asked Yu Jing if she can make the trip and she said she can come by to clean on weekends."

"Wait, wait, are you serious?" His brother set down the paper, frowning at Shen Yuan. "Why would you want to leave?"

"Because I'm an adult?" Shizun crossed his arms defensively. "Because I can't just live with my parents forever?"

“And just what *adult* responsibilities do you have, a-Yuan?” Shen An raised an eyebrow. “Does an adult with no job spend all day reading webnovels?”

Shizun bristled. “Shen Mei can go off on her own, but I can’t?”

Shen An sighed. “Meimei is different. You know that.”

His jaw clenched. “And how is she different?”

“Please… don’t make me say it.”

“Say it.”

Shen An closed his eyes. “It’s because she has friends.”

Shen Yuan shot up in his seat in fury. “My health is no-!” He broke off his own sentence and gaped at his brother. “Wait, what did you say?”

“You have no friends, A-Yuan.”

Shizun cried in offense, but his brother gave him no reprieve. “It would be one thing if you had a licence. Tell me, if you have an emergency, do you know anyone with a car?” Shen An questioned. “

Shen Yuan interjected, “Wen Guo-”

“Does not count,” An swiftly denied. “Some rich boy with a crush on you is not a reliable person.” Shizun opened his mouth to argue, but Shen An swiftly cut in, “And if you’re too oblivious to even see that, then there’s no way you’ll survive on your own!”

“You can’t stop me!”

“You are not going anywhere, unless you want to get a job and pay rent yourself!” Shen An slammed his hands against the tabletop. “This is the end of our discussion!”

“You…!” Shizun’s face reddened in indignation before he turned around and stormed off. As he exited the lounge, he slammed the door behind him hard enough to rattle the hanging framed photos nearby. Shen An sighed and squeezed his eyelids, oozing exhaustion and concern.

Luo Binghe remained at the scene. Barely thirty seconds passed before the door opened again. Shen Yuan walked out with a phone in his hands. “I'm ordering food and there's a gluten free section, do you want anything?”

“You're not supposed to eat out this much,” Shen An scolded.

“Oh my god, okay, fine!” Shen Yuan snarked. “I won’t get you anything!”

“No, no, wait!”

Shizun smirked, then took a seat next to his brother. “I’ll get the buns if you share them with me.”

For two people to be at odds one moment and then sit together so calmly the next… it was utterly inconceivable for someone like Luo Binghe. The two of them leaned over the phone screen, looking at the menu together. “What about cake?”

“They have whole cakes, but you won’t be able to finish the whole thing.”

“We can put the cake in the fridge,” An objected. Huh. Binghe wouldn't have predicted a sweet tooth.

“And mint lemonade for mom,” Shen Yuan said as he added the item to his cart.

The older brother huffed and leaned back in his seat. “You can’t bribe me with sweets, you know. You’re still not moving out.”

“Oh, then I guess I’ll just cancel this order-”

Shen An lunged for the phone. “Don’t you dare!”

Shen Yuan and Luo Binghe walked through the automatic glass doors again, after promptly being refused service. Shizun pulled down his face mask low enough to give Binghe an apologetic smile. “Sorry Binghe, they’re low on space… You’re gonna have to wait outside.”

“But shizun!” Binghe cried.

“Stay here,” Shen Yuan ordered. Binghe whined as he pawed at shizun's sweater, but the man just playfully pushed him away. “I'm telling you, I'll be right out.”

Pouting, Luo Binghe waited outside the store. Standing on the sidewalk, it didn't take long for him to attract attention. It seemed every time he shook off some woman asking for his number, another appeared. He ducked into the side alley, where he’d be able to see his teacher when he exited.

Leaning against the brick wall, his mind wandered off to their shared apartment. Dinner was planned out, but he still hadn't made dessert… Shen Yuan loved sweets. Binghe didn't see the appeal of them until recently, when shizun moaned around a puff pastry and licked the cream off his lips. After that, Luo Binghe made sure to bake something every single day.

Someone stepped in front of him, blocking the sun. “Sir, do you have any change?”

Were beggars in this world so polite? Binghe shook his head. Shen Yuan had opened a bank account for him long ago, but at the time, he'd tossed the plastic card aside. He cringed at his

past arrogance – it was a miracle shizun hadn't kicked him out ages ago…

“I don't have any cash,” he informed the stranger. If he needed to buy something, Shen Yuan always did it for him.

The man was undeterred. “You're covered in brand name clothing, but don't have change?”

Luo Binghe almost felt embarrassed. The clothes he was currently wearing were also gifts from his shizun. He almost felt like a kept man, and- and the thought made him blush. He really wouldn’t mind such a thing if it was for Shen Yuan…

Lost in this newly discovered fantasy, he didn’t reply to the impatient beggar. The man pulled his hand out of his pocket, and swung open a knife. “If you don't have money,” he said with a smile, “I'll take those shoes.”

Ah, so it wasn’t the beggars that were polite here, it was the muggers. Still, this man had the worst luck to choose *him* as a target. Luo Binghe sighed. “Shizun said I'm not allowed to kill anyone, so this lord will spare you this time.”

“Don’t waste my time!” The man burst out. “I can take those after I cut up your pretty face too, so don’t test me!”

Right after this proclamation, the man shrieked and collapsed onto the ground, revealing Shen Yuan behind him. The thief was knocked unconscious on the dirty concrete floor, and Binghe’s master gingerly stepped over his body to move towards him.

“What an idiot,” shizun commented idly as he looked at the man with disdain. In his hand was some sort of device, much thicker than a phone- it glowed blue briefly before dimming out. Shen Yuan's disgust vanished when his gaze returned to Binghe, his usual gentle smile taking over his face as he pocketed his weapon. “Good boy, Binghe!” Shizun stood on his toes so his hand could reach up to pat Binghe's head. “You remembered what I said about not killing people here!”

Binghe purred and leaned down, nuzzling into shizun's hand. “Shizun, how did shizun do that?”

“Hm? Oh.” Shen Yuan held the device out for him to see. “Did I ever teach Binghe what a taser is?”

Shizun…! Luo Binghe covered his flustered cheeks with his hands. Shizun was so sexy like this, so strong and cool! “Shizun!” Binghe engulfed Shen Yuan's small body easily, holding him tight in his arms. “Shizun, shizun always protects me…”

Luo Binghe loved when Shen Yuan came to his aid without hesitation whenever Binghe's safety was in question. He also loved when Shen Yuan was helpless and weak, and needed to lean on Binghe to stay standing. It had been a confusing concept, to love such contradictory traits, until Luo Binghe realized that he simply loved every part of Shen Yuan.

“Ah, Binghe,” shizun squirmed in his hold. “We should leave before someone sees-”

Binghe pushed Shen Yuan against the nearing wall and kissed him deeply. Shizun made a noise of alarm, but quickly melted against him. His beloved's arms wrapped around Binghe's neck, so Binghe naturally lifted Shen Yuan higher. Pinned between the brick wall and Binghe's body, shizun shuddered as Binghe's tongue slid along his.

"Shizun," Binghe groaned between kisses. Shen Yuan keened when Luo Binghe nosed into his neck, leaving enthusiastic bites. "Shizun is so good to this disciple!"

"Mhm!" Shizun was releasing intoxicatingly soft whimpers under Binghe's administration. It was all ruined when-

Shen Yuan stiffened against him when a voice called out, "Stop! Don't move!"

"Oh *shit."*

Binghe whined when he pushed him off, but shizun firmly kept him at bay as a woman approached.

"Follow my lead." Shen Yuan sighed and held his hands out in surrender. "Don't resist, Binghe."

The 'officer' held the door open for the two of them. After endless questioning, Shen Yuan and Luo Binghe were allowed to meet with someone who'd come to have them released.

Binghe didn't understand – he hadn't done anything wrong. But shizun told him to obey, so he did.

What was his life like before he became shizun's obedient dog? Binghe didn't want to remember.

"Ge," Shen Yuan greeted the man.

By now Binghe had met shizun's meimei and er-ge. The two of them joined Shen An at the table.

"First of all, I want to say I did literally nothing wrong," Shen Yuan stated.

His brother adjusted his glasses, looking over the documents. "It says here you tased someone, and then made out with another man next to his unconscious body."

Shen Yuan stared at the desk guiltily. "I mean, that's a very… simplified retelling of events."

"Oh?" The other man exclaimed. "If there's any other way to explain your actions, I'd love to hear it."

“If you're just going to judge me, I'll call mom instead!”

Shen An threw a file in front of them. “You think mom would be okay with public indecency, assault-”

“Self defence!” Shen Yuan cried. “He was a thief!”

“-unauthorised carrying of weapon-”

“You can remove the taser thing, this station is super cheap.”

Shen Yuan's brother sputtered as he added onto his list, *“and bribery!”*

“You can yell at me later, right now can you just have Binghe released?” Shizun had an unconcerned air as he leaned back into his chair. “His documents are, ahem, a home project.”

Binghe didn't understand what that meant, but judging by Shen An's pinched expression, it wasn't anything good.

“Where…” He took a deep inhale before continuing, “A-Yuan how did you even get him into the system?”

“I'm not selling out my supplier,” Shen Yuan said casually.

“This is… so many crimes.” The man's head fell into his hands. In his misery he groaned out, “Are there any other illegal activities you've taken to dabbling in?”

The guilty look from before overtook Shen Yuan’s delicate features again. An awkward cough had Shen An looking back at his brother. “Uh, don’t freak out, but…” Shen Yuan cringed, hunching his shoulders as he prepared himself. “I might also have… cocaine at home?”

A sob escaped Shen An and he all but collapsed against the table.

Binghe leaned closer to Shen Yuan. “Shizun, what’s that?”

“Recreational drug.” He continued sheepishly, “Ge, I didn’t *buy* it, some asshole pushed it onto me at some party like a year ago! I couldn’t just Google ‘how to get rid of drugs’ so I just put it in a drawer and kind of forgot about it… until now…”

“A-Yuan, you're killing me,” Shen An whimpered into the tabletop, “you're killing your brother.”

Shen Yuan closed his mouth. Binghe didn’t dare say anything, but the older Shen’s eyes still landed on him,

“And who are you? A-Yuan has never gotten into trouble like this before,” Shen An said. He fixed Luo Binghe with a disapproving glower. “I can only assume this is the result of negative influence.”

“You’re seriously turning into a boomer, you know that?” Shizun sighed. “Next you’ll be blaming violent movies and video games.”

Shen An ignored the barb. “I’ve taken care of everything here *quietly.* You’ll be moving back in with us now.”

Shen Yuan finally gasped in outrage, but his brother didn’t pay him any mind.

“And you!” Shen An turned to face Luo Binghe. “Go home, and never let me catch you near my brother again, or else!”

Luo Binghe’s mind screamed in affront. “No!” Binghe yelled. “I will *never* leave shizun’s side, not now that I’ve finally found him!”

Shen Yuan flushed pink, staring up at Binghe.

“I’m not giving you a choice!” Shen An’s frown deepened. “I’m telling you right now, go home *or else!”*

Binghe squared his shoulders, ready to put the man in his place, but shizun spoke up first. “So do you want Binghe to go home or stay away from me?”

Shen An raised a brow at the question, visibly confused.

“Oh, meimei and Ming-ge didn’t tell you?” Shen Yuan grinned. “Okay, this is gonna be really funny.”

“He lives here,” Shen An mumbled in disbelief. “He fucking lives here? Since when?”

Shen Yuan unfolded a blanket left on the sofa, wrapping it around himself. “You’re, like, the last person to know, by the way,” he said. “Even mom and dad know about Binghe.”

Shizun talked about him with his parents? Luo Binghe’s mind was going wild imagining what those conversations would look like… Surely they must have been demanding Shen Yuan stop fooling around with Binghe, and get married, and have lots of children, and actually, no, those children would get in the way of their quality time, get rid of those children-

“They know?” Shen An repeated, interrupting Binghe’s daydream. “And they’re all just… okay with this?”

This was Binghe’s time to speak! “This one has proven himself to Shen Mei and Shen Ming,” he blurted. “May I ask for Shen An’s blessing to be with his brother!?”

"... *no,"* Shen An said bluntly. He seemed bewildered that Binghe was even asking. "I've known you for half a day, and our first meeting involved bailing you out of prison. Why would I *ever* trust you with my brother?"

"Not prison," Shen Yuan said quietly. "We were just in jail."

Shen An rolled his eyes. "Sorry, you were just in a regular old jail! That's alright then!"

Shizun sighed. "If you'd like some tea, Binghe makes it very well."

"Oh, shizun…" Binghe sighed demurely. Shen An glanced at him, and Binghe quickly corrected himself, "Yuan-gege is very kind to me."

"You," Shen An pointed at him, "need to leave." He crossed his arms, looking his nose down at Binghe like he was dirt. "I suggest you do so before we have to *make you."*

"Are you serious?" Shen Yuan's voice was full of frustration. "Why stop there? Make it a real dogblood drama, say you'll pay him to stay away from me!"

"Would that work?" Shen An glanced at Binghe with consideration. "How much for you to cut all contact?"

"Ge!" Shen Yuan cried. He stood up, abandoning the blanket. "When are you going to understand, I'm not a kid anymore! You don't get to rule over my life!"

"You *are* a kid!" His brother rolled his eyes.

"Whether you like it or not, I'm an adult and I can take care of myself!"

"And this-" Shen An stormed towards Shen Yuan's bedroom and threw the door open- "this is what you call taking care of yourself?"

The three looked into the exposed room. The bed was neatly made, there wasn't a speck of dust on the shelves, and the floor was spotless. The laundry bin was empty, any dirtied clothes long folded and put away. Luo Binghe had tidied up the apartment considerably since he began courting his shizun!

"What…" Shen An gaped at the clean room, while Shen Yuan beamed with vindication. "Where did all your toys go?"

"Toys?" Shizun bristled.

Shen An stepped into the room, looking around in shock. "Where are your dolls? And your body pillows?"

He must have been referring to the 'figures' shizun collected. Although he'd stopped hiding the small disciple-era 'nendoroid' of Binghe after it had been discovered, he was still too shy to display the rest.

"I don't-" Shen Yuan shyly eyed Binghe. "I've never had a body pillow."

The poor man was visibly flustered when he closed the door again, practically running to the kitchen. “Okay, so you learned how to pick up after yourself,” he acquiesced, “but that’s not enough to live on!” He flung open the refrigerator door. “Look at this!”

The fridge revealed rows of fresh fruits, washed and placed into glass containers for freshness. Healthy leftovers were neatly boxed and stacked to be reused in recipes later. All the food was in pristine condition- Binghe would never buy second-rate ingredients for shizun’s dinners!

“I… I don't understand,” Shen An mumbled.

“You were saying I’m not an adult?” Shizun was radiating smugness as he skipped over and reached into the fridge. “Would a child have-” Shen Yuan picked up a carton at random, studying it before shoving it in his brother’s face- *“quinoa?* Ha!”

Shen An gasped. “You eat quinoa now!?”

“That’s right!” Shen Yuan’s grin was spread from ear to ear as he lazily threw his arms up. “Ge, this is literally so embarrassing for you. I am the epitome of being a responsible and self-sufficient adult, and you’re projecting super hard.”

“No!” Shen An insisted. “This- paying Yu Jing to clean up after you doesn’t mean anything.”

“O-ho!” Shizun slapped his hands together in joy. “Oh, ignorant, foolish brother of mine! Yu Jing hasn’t been here in *weeks.”*

Shen An staggered backwards in shock. “No…!”

“Ohhhh, look at that!” Shen Yuan leaned against Binghe’s side, pointing his thumb over his shoulder towards his brother’s direction. “Binghe, can you believe my brother? He has a maid to pick up after him, and he’s calling *us* irresponsible.”

Shen An choked, like the words had physically struck him. “How… how is this possible…”

Shizun’s smile softened into something more proud than self-pleased. “To be honest, I have Binghe to thank for all that.”

Shen An had a reluctant grimace on his face when he faced Luo Binghe. “It seems you… aren’t a terrible influence on my brother. However,” he continued, “don’t think for a moment I will not make you disappear if that changes.”

“Don’t threaten Binghe because you’re jealous,” shizun said coolly.

Shen An’s phone chimed, and he cursed under his breath as he glanced at the screen. “I have to go,” he said as he hastily shoved it back into his pocket. He gave them one last glance. “But don’t think this is over!”

The moment the door closed behind him, Shen Yuan squealed and jumped into Luo Binghe’s arms. Binghe just barely managed to catch him, thrown off by such an unexpected action from his thin-faced teacher.

Even more shockingly, Shen Yuan slipped his arms around Binghe's neck, pulling him down into a kiss.

Shizun almost never initiated, and never with this much enthusiasm! Luo Binghe blushed, looking down at his overjoyed teacher.

"You're so awesome, Binghe," Shen Yuan praised. "You totally helped me stick it to da-ge!"

His smile… way too cute for Binghe to handle….!!! Heavenly demons did have a weakness, and it was happy shizuns!! Shen Yuan continued talking while Binghe thanked the gods for this treat.

"I mean he's totally right about everything," Shen Yuan babbled excitedly. "This place would be a mess if you weren't here, but oh my god, Binghe, you don't have siblings so you have *no* idea how satisfying it is to win against your older brother…"

Binghe listened to his shizun ramble, his head spinning from his shizun's adorable behaviour. This was undoubtedly the greatest day of Luo Binghe's life…

Luo Binghe had come to truly love this new routine he'd created with Shen Yuan. Waking his master with breakfast in bed every morning, exploring the city or watching TV, fondly watching him yell at badly-written dramas before dinner… It was domestic in a way Binghe never thought he would experience.

For the first time ever, Shen Yuan poked at the meal restlessly instead of clearing his plate. Their conversation was one-sided, with him speaking and shizun absentmindedly nodded along. When Binghe didn't say anything, there were long silences while Shen Yuan stared at the wall.

Luo Binghe finally broached the topic. "Is shizun dissatisfied with this disciple's cooking?"

Shizun's head perked upwards, lost in thought. "Huh? Oh!" Shen Yuan shook his head. "No, no! Your cooking is fantastic, you know that."

"Shizun seems distracted," Binghe said. He tried not to let his insecurity show, but judging by the guilt on Shen Yuan's face, it was blaringly obvious.

"Everything is fine, it's just… You might want to return to your world for a few weeks." Shen Yuan said warily. "I can also pay for a hotel for you, if you'd like to stay here."

His first instinct was to panic. Did shizun not want him here anymore? Had he gotten bored of their new arrangement so quickly? Pushing past the terror, he asked, "Why?"

"My chest is feeling a little sore," Shen Yuan admitted. "By the time I wake up tomorrow, it's probably going to be a lot worse, and you don't want to stick around for that."

His chest? “Binghe can brew some tea,” he offered pathetically.

“It’s probably just strep, I get it like every other month – it’s nothing serious.” Shizun insisted. “My doctor said she’ll be here tonight, but- yeah, I won’t be pleasant company while I’m sick.”

After all this time, did shizun still think Binghe would abandon him at the first sign of illness? “I’m staying,” he said resolutely.

Shen Yuan only smiled sadly and replied, “Alright. Don’t force yourself if you change your mind.”

Luo Binghe watched anxiously as the doctor performed various tests, prodding shizun’s body and typing down the results on her small laptop.

“Just pneumonia,” she finally announced. “A few days of rest and some antibiotics, and you’ll be back to normal in no time.”

Binghe looked to his shizun, betrayed. “Pneumonia!? Gege said it was nothing serious!”

“It’s not serious,” Shen Yuan waved his hand, but there was clear fatigue behind the action. “I told you, it happens all the time.”

Luo Binghe couldn’t figure out how something like this had even happened. Shizun spent all his time inside the apartment, and it only had clean, filtered air. He only ordered food from choice restaurants, and never left home without a face mask-

Oh. Luo Binghe’s stomach tightened. Because of Binghe, Shen Yuan had been dragged to a dusty park, done unsavory things in a public bathroom, and been restrained by authorities.

“Shizun.” Binghe’s hand cradled Shen Yuan’s overheating face, and shizun sighed happily against his cool skin. “Shizun, forgive me… this is my fault.”

Shen Yuan’s head lolled to the side, like he didn’t even have the strength to turn to face Binghe. “Don’t be silly…” He flinched at his own words and closed his eyes. When he spoke again, his voice was even quieter than before. “I’ve actually never gone this long without getting sick.”

“That’s true,” the doctor added. “He’s *severely* downplaying his situation,” she said with a glare directed at Shen Yuan, “but pneumonia is not too uncommon for those with compromised immune systems.” The woman tapped away at her laptop a few more times before closing the screen. “Okay, a nurse should be here by tomorrow morning at the latest.” She shared a sympathetic look. “It will be someone new, but we don’t have anyone else available at the moment.”

“A nurse?” Binghe asked. “But you’re already here.”

“She’s only here to check up on me,” Shen Yuan explained. “I need a nurse to stay here until I recover.”

As if he would entrust shizun to someone else when he was in such a vulnerable state! “No need,” Binghe said confidently. “I’ll be here to watch after Shen Yuan.”

“What?” Shen Yuan shot upright in the bed. “No!”

The immediate refusal did hurt, but he was determined. “Does Yuan-ge find this one inadequate?”

“No, no, Binghe, you're perfect,” Shen Yuan assured. “But it’s a lot of work, and it’s not exactly pleasant-”

“This Binghe won’t leave Shen Yuan in his hour of need!”

They’d both forgotten the doctor’s presence until she spoke up. “Yes, well, that’s very romantic and all, but it’s the patient’s decision.”

Luo Binghe turned to Shen Yuan with pleading eyes, begging for him to choose him. This was their home, and this was his shizun! How could he leave him in the care of a stranger? “Please, shizun,” Binghe urged, “give me a chance to prove myself.”

Shen Yuan opened his mouth, but upon seeing Binghe’s face he hesitated. He was sure he’d burst into tears if shizun denied him, and he had an inkling that Shen Yuan was aware of this as well.

Finally he answered, “If Binghe is sure…”

The woman present raised a brow, but didn’t question Shen Yuan’s choice. “I’ll keep someone on call for you just in case.”

Like the doctor had predicted, shizun’s state was much worse in the morning. Shen Yuan’s skin was hot to the touch, and when he wasn’t shaking from chills, he was sweating through his clothes.

His fever was too high for him to leave the bed. Luo Binghe was by his side with the prescribed anti-biotics like clockwork, helping shizun sit upright long enough to take them before he dozed off again.

Luo Binghe fastidiously cooked warm, easy to swallow meals with plenty of nutrients. If he was lucky, Shen Yuan would force down a few spoonfuls and keep his eyes open for an hour

or so before returning to slumber. Otherwise, shizun would heave the meal back out into the small bin by his bedside.

The most concerning part was… shizun wasn't recovering. Shen Yuan had been bedbound for nearly half a week, and his fever had barely been reduced.

He tried to make shizun's days a bit less monotonous while he was sick. Luo Binghe brought Shen Yuan's laptop into bed, cuddling him while he put on one of shizun's favourite donghua. Shizun managed to watch for a minute and a half before he winced in pain.

"Sorry, Binghe, I…" Shen Yuan swallowed slowly, clearly in pain. "The screen is too bright."

"No, no, shizun, it's this disciple who should apologize!" Binghe cried. He hurriedly closed the computer and removed it from sight. Crawling back into the bed empty-handed, Binghe asked, "Is there anything else Binghe can bring to entertain shizun while he is resting?"

"I…" Shizun shook his head. "I'm sorry. This must be boring."

"Not at all!" Binghe insisted. "Every moment spent with shizun is like heaven!"

Shen Yuan huffed out a laugh, but Binghe could see the physical toll of forcing himself awake around his tired eyes.

"It's okay, shizun," Binghe assured him. "Focus on getting better. This disciple will still be here when shizun wakes."

As if Shen Yuan had been waiting for permission, he nodded and closed his eyes, sinking back into his pillow.

While shizun slept, Luo Binghe wondered if Shen Yuan had pushed himself to stay up for his sake. He knew the illness left shizun feeling exhausted. Sometimes the fever made Shen Yuan too fatigued to think, and he would only stare into nothingness when he was awake.

Luo Binghe had become used to lively days with his shizun. Sitting by his side quietly, watching him sleep was…

Being without Shen Yuan was so lonely.

"Shizun," Binghe mumbled to himself, "please get better quickly. I can't bear being without you."

Shen Yuan's eyes fluttered open at his words. Binghe wondered if he'd woken his teacher up and interrupted his rest, but shizun groaned and held out his arm for Binghe to help him up. "I just need to use the washroom."

Binghe would have preferred to carry Shen Yuan like a bride, but there were only so many times he could do that before shizun got fussy, so he slung the shorter man's arm over his shoulder and walked him to the bathroom.

Carefully setting him down on top of the toilet, Binghe stood by. “Does shizun need-”

“I can at least pee by myself!” Shizun yelped. “Go stand outside!”

Luo Binghe frowned, but followed his orders.

“Close the door,” Shen Yuan groaned.

Luo Binghe sifted closer to the door. “Apologies shizun, the doctor instructed this one to keep you within sight at all times.”

Shen Yuan crossed his forearms over his lap, then hunched over until he was resting his head on them. “At least spare me this much dignity and look away?”

Just for a moment was probably okay, right? If it was that important to shizun’s comfort…

Only a few minutes after, Luo Binghe heard the toilet flush. The sound was followed by shizun crying out before falling over.

“Shizun!?” He barged into the bathroom and found Shen Yuan sprawled across the tiled floor. “Shizun!” Binghe rushed towards his teacher, quickly grabbing him by the underarms and pulling him onto his feet. “Shizun, what happened?”

Shen Yuan groaned, avoiding Binghe’s eyes in embarrassment. “Wait, I haven’t washed my hands yet…”

He was trying to get up himself? The sink was at least five feet away! “Shizun knows he can’t walk that far on his own,” Binghe chided gently. With shizun leaning against him, he walked the two of them to the tap.

Shen Yuan didn’t say a word while Binghe rubbed his hands with soap and rinsed. That wasn’t so odd these days, when shizun had to rest his lungs or when he wasn’t lucid. Even once he was carried back to bed and layered up in blankets, shizun’s expression was still distressed.

Binghe sat at the edge of the bed, taking Shen Yuan’s hand encouragingly. “What’s the matter, shizun?”

“Ugh,” Shen Yuan groaned. He was too ashamed to look Luo Binghe in the face. “This is why I said you should leave for a while, it gets… it gets gross.”

This again? Binghe pursed his lips in displeasure. This close to Shen Yuan, he could taste the sickly scent in the room.

It wasn’t like he didn’t understand shizun’s point of view.

Luo Binghe wed many sickly maidens who needed him as a cure, but their symptoms could only be described as *pretty.* How beautiful to cough up flower petals, or gain a heated flush on your cheeks that could only be mimicked by cosmetics. It wasn’t as romantic to clean a bucket of vomit when dual cultivation couldn’t solve all problems.

“Surely you can’t be enjoying this,” Shen Yuan rasped out.

“Indeed, this lord takes no pleasure seeing shizun like this,” Binghe admitted softly.

Shizun smiled, squeezing Luo Binghe’s hand gently. “I appreciate this, but you don’t have to force yourself any more than this. I know you’re a good friend, you don’t need to prove it. There’s people who do this for a living…”

There was a lot to unpack, but he zeroed in on the most offending word. “Friend?” Binghe choked out.

Shen Yuan paused, looking back at Binghe shyly. “Uh, are we not…” He stared at their joined hands. “I thought since…”

“Shizun.” Luo Binghe grasped his teacher’s chin, guiding his eyes back onto him. “We are more than friends.” Shen Yuan opened his mouth, but Binghe cut him off before his shizun could say anything more ridiculous. “No, we are not *best friends,* or roomates, or anything else that shizun is thinking. Shen Yuan is my soulmate.”

Shen Yuan wheezed so violently at the proclamation, Luo Binghe nearly jumped for his inhaler. Shizun quickly righted himself, staring at him with wide panicked eyes. “What!?”

“What’s wrong, shizun?” Binghe pushed himself onto the bed, shifting closer to Shen Yuan. “Are you alright? What do you need?”

Shizun looked frozen in shock until he turned his head away and whispered, “OOC.”

“What is OOC, shizun?” Binghe urged him for more details. “Are you trying to say ICD? Should I bring the defibrillator!?”

“This is the worst fever dream ever,” Shen Yuan muttered under his breath. “Insane level mischaracterization.”

What was he talking about? “Shizun?”

“Luo Binghe would not fucking say that,” shizun breathed out.

“But… but shizun,” Binghe stuttered, “I am Luo Binghe?”

“Luo Binghe from Wish, maybe.” Shen Yuan ducked his face into his elbow, hiding behind his arm. “In what world would a demon lord with a harem call someone his soulmate!?”

Oh! Did Shen Yuan believe this was not reality? Because Luo Binghe did not behave enough like his past self? Binghe softly grasped his wrists, pulling his arms away from Shen Yuan’s hidden face. “Understood... This lord shall return with a courting gift shizun will deem worthy, as a demon lord should.”

“Ugh…!” Whether Shen Yuan’s face was flushed red due to illness or embarrassment, Binghe didn’t know. He just pulled shizun into his chest, holding the man gently in his arms.

“Shizun has exerted himself enough,” he whispered. He could hear shizun’s voice getting more and more hoarse, and he was scared of the healing they may have undone with this conversation. “It’s time to rest now.”

Shen Yuan didn’t argue. He just fisted his hands into Binghe’s clothes and nuzzled into him.

Luo Binghe adjusted his eyes to the scene of a new memory in Shen Yuan’s dream realm. This was the youngest he’d seen his shizun yet – he must have been ten years old or so, laying down in bed in a thin blue robe. A handful of people surrounded him, as well as several monitors. Wires were connected to round stickers dotting Shen Yuan’s chest.

Oddly enough, Shen Yuan was not the only one who’d shrunk. Luo Binghe was about the same age, and his appearance reflected his younger self a bit too perfectly. His frizzy locks were tangled painfully, and his dirty robe was pulling apart at the seams. He tried to change back to his adult self, but to no avail.

There were two young boys around him, as well as a small girl and two adults. It was Luo Binghe’s first time seeing the entire Shen family together. His mother was a short and chubby woman, standing next to her stoic looking husband. She fussed over Shen Yuan while his father chimed in with an encouraging word every now and then. Binghe smiled, picking out their clear influences on Shen Yuan’s personality.

“Are you comfortable?” Shen An asked. “Do you need us to adjust the bed? You know how to do it yourself too, right?”

Shen Ming pressed two nearby buttons repeatedly, making the bed go up and down until their mother took the remote out of his hand. “Stop that!”

Shen Mei must have been too young to understand the situation, because she just stomped her tiny feet and refused to budge. “I’m not going home without gege! Why can’t I stay with him!?”

“It’s not a sleepover,” her father chided.

Shizun’s mother peppered loud kisses over her son’s forehead. “Don’t worry, we’ll be here first thing in the morning.”

“It’s probably nothing and then they’ll send you home,” his father added with a ruffle of his hair.

“Okay!” Shen Yuan waved to them as they filed out of the room one by one. “Bye!”

Finally left alone, he nestled into the odd bed. A content smile was on his young face as he cuddled his new bear, surrounded by numerous gifts.

Binghe stood in the corner, watching him in his rags.

The distance between the two children felt vast, and impossible to cross. Their lives couldn't have been more different if they tried. Even if Luo Binghe had nothing else, his heavenly blood protected him.

Lost in thought, he jolted when a pair of bare feet came into view. This young version of Shen Yuan was studying him with excited interest, the stuffed animal still in his hands. "Are you here alone?"

He could see Binghe? Until now, he could only observe the dreams from the outside, like an invisible ghost incapable of changing anything. It seemed his steadily returning powers could finally let him interact with dreams again.

Binghe tried to shift his tattered clothing into something more presentable. He was mortified. When was the last time anyone had seen him like this? "I'm fine."

Shen Yuan hummed before stepping forward. The soft teddy bear was gently placed into Luo Binghe's arms. "There you go," Shen Yuan said cheerfully.

Binghe held the bear. "But I can't give you anything in return."

Like the spoiled young master he was, Shen Yuan insisted, "you must have *something* ."

What could Binghe give him? This boy had everything: a loving home, wealth, self-confidence. Shen Yuan was the physical manifestation of everything Luo Binghe yearned for as a child. But he didn't need to respond with a material gift, right? Maybe Binghe could do something for him instead…

Binghe leaned over the toy in his hands and kissed Shen Yuan.

The other boy made a small startled noise in the back of his throat, and Binghe pulled away quickly.

"Oh," Shen Yuan whispered. He was covering his mouth with his hands in surprise when he turned his back to Binghe and walked away.

Binghe's heart hurt at the sight of being a rejected, unwanted child once again. He sniffled, looking down at his lap with unshed tears blurring his vision.

Someone tapped his shoulder and Luo Binghe looked up to see Shen Yuan again. This time he was holding out a plastic figurine.

"Well?" Shen Yuan thrust the item into Binghe's arms. The small boy's face was completely red, unable to even look at Binghe. "Now… you have to give me another…"

"You don't have to give me something every time." Binghe was blushing with him now. "I like kissing you."

Shen Yuan covered his flustered face behind his hands. "I like it too…"

Binghe set aside the stuffed bear. “But I want more than toys,” he said. “I want shizun. Binghe wants to marry Yuan-gege!”

“Who’s stopping you!?” Shen Yuan snapped.

Binghe gaped, trying to make sense of that. Shizun sounded angry, but also like he was saying yes? “Does this mean you accept?”

Shen Yuan huffed and stared into the hospital room’s corner, but didn’t answer.

“Shizun!” Binghe tugged at shizun’s flimsy robe. There were tears in his eyes as he begged, “Shizun, please I need to know…!”

Shen Yuan cried, “Honestly, take a hint! That obviously means yes!”

“Really!?”

“I’m not saying it again!”

“No, wait! Shizun, just one more time, please!”

Shen Yuan was in no state to speak the next morning. His burning forehead was dripping sweat, and his chest trembling with the effort it took to breathe. Luo Binghe pursed his lips before scooping Shen Yuan into his arms.

“Shizun.” He slowly lifted the small body against his chest. “Shizun?”

Shen Yuan whimpered and opened his eyes, but was too disoriented to reply. Seeing his lover in a state like this, Luo Binghe made up his mind.

“Shizun, I can help you recover faster,” He whispered. “If shizun is willing to accompany me to my world, this disciple can eliminate what ails him.”

Shen Yuan blinked back at Binghe blankly. He was in no state to reply to him – probably couldn’t even understand what he was saying. Perhaps shizun would be angry with him afterwards, but Luo Binghe couldn’t bear to see him this way any longer.

“Hold on tight, shizun,” Binghe instructed. Carrying Shen Yuan in his arms, he retrieved Xin Mo from the long-abandoned guest bedroom and slashed a portal open.

He’d never imagined taking shizun to his home world. If it wasn’t a necessity, he would never subject his beloved to the harshness of that demonic world. Binghe squeezed him protectively before stepping in.

He recognized his old palace the moment he arrived. There was a specific heaviness in the air unique to the merged realms, almost oppressive and stifling. His demonic energy seemed to surge with power in response.

In Shen Yuan's world, Binghe was aware of his blood in shizun's body. He could vaguely feel its presence, even if he could not truly use it to its fullest extent. Like a TV with no signal: not broken, but not working either. Now it came to life as the forgotten sensation flooded Binghe's brain. He could feel every part of Shen Yuan from the inside; he didn't remember the sensation being so… intimate.

With a single command, his parasites were fighting the virus in shizun's body. Luo Binghe could *see* Shen Yuan's breathing ease and his eyes clear.

When he spoke again, the nasally pitch had been replaced by the voice Binghe loved so much.

"What…" Shen Yuan slowly rolled his head. "I'm feeling- did you do something?"

"This disciple begs forgiveness," Binghe said softly. "But there was no other way to help shizun."

"What did you…" Shen Yuan trailed off as his head whipped left and right, taking in his new environment. "Where are we?"

"Shizun is in this disciple's home world. Shizun knows my powers are less difficult to control here, and I…"

Binghe looked around the miserable residence that was once the grandest in the realms. The walls had been stripped bare of anything that could be considered valuable, and any servants left when he did.

"This disciple must apologize," Luo Binghe mumbled in shame. "Since this lord divorced his wives without any plans to return, he allowed them to take any resources they deemed fit. The palace is in a very pitiful state at the moment…"

Shizun's jaw dropped. He looked shaken to his core. It was understandable – he'd just been taken to another world, miraculously healed, and shown a deserted palace, of course Shen Yuan would be surprised about-

Shen Yuan's voice was distraught as he screeched, "What do you mean, *divorced your wives!?"*

Chapter End Notes

I won't lie this chapter did get a bit hard for me to write because anyone whos taken care of someone with a severe chronic illness knows that it takes a lot out of you as well as the patient. I was getting flashbacks and shit. At some point you can tell i’m just very obviously ranting about the glorification of chronic illness. If you need to skip a portion of this chapter for your mental health, no judgment here whatsoever

also next chapter they'll finally fuck thank GOD

Chapter 8: there's another hill ahead

Chapter Notes

> okay guys i know it's been almost a year since i last updated this fic but in my defense my mom almost died and I had to spend some time in another country because of my deadbeat dad with cancer and there was this whole drama about my substance abuse and currently we might be losing the house . i know i know ao3 author moment. anyway enjoy the binngeyuan!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Once word spread of Luo Binghe's return, it didn't take long for all his former subordinates to come crawling back with pitiful pledges of allegiance. There were a handful of demons stupid enough to challenge the returning emperor, but listening to Shen Yuan cheer for him as he beat them back into place was so satisfying he didn't mind their arrogance.

Mobei-Jun and Sha Hualing arrived almost immediately after he issued their summons- along with the two demon generals, there was also a human accompanying them.

Shizun made a struggle to get off his lap, but Luo Binghe held him firmly in place with a grin. This was where shizun belonged! There was no chance Luo Binghe would pass up the chance to show off his empress.

"Listen up!" Mobei-Jun and Sha Hualing sat across the wooden table of their war room, ready for instruction. Binghe held up a hand. "Actually, wait a moment."

He tilted his head down to press a quick kiss to Shen Yuan's cheek. This was something couples did in shizun's world, right? He'd seen TV scenes where the wife would kiss her husband before he left for work.

Shizun's huffed in bashful indignation, and flapped open his fan to hide his face. Surely, this was an invitation for more, right? Why else would shizun shield the two of them from their audience? Binghe leaned down to kiss him deeply.

"Lord Luo called us here to watch him make out with this twink?" Sha Hualing called.

"While the palace is being rebuilt, this lord is going on his honeymoon." Binghe nodded to Mobei-Jun. "You're in charge of rebuilding the palace during that time."

"Junshang, this Mobei-Jun…" Mobei-Jun pulled forward the chubby little man onto his own lap. The poor thing looked terrified, or maybe he was just shaking so much because the ice demon was so cold? "...is also taking time off for a honeymoon."

Shen Yuan shot up in his seat at the sight, pointing his closed fan at the stranger. “Wait, is that fucking Airplane?”

"You!" *'Airplane'* yelled back. "Peerless Cucumber, you-"

Binghe growled. "Watch how you speak to the empress."

Airplane squealed and shrunk away, hiding his face into Mobei-Jun’s chest.

Binghe sighed. “Okay, Sha Hualing. This is *only* because there is absolutely no one else available right now, but you are in charge-”

“YES!” Sha Hualing roared. “The era of Ling’er starts now!” She jumped onto the table with her bare feet, and dramatically pointed at a guard. “You! Spread my latest decree- all men in the kingdom are to be feminized!”

“Uh,” the guard said.

“And!” Sha Hualing continued. “Anyone prettier than me must be put to death.”

At quiet moments like this, Mobei-Jun’s deep and monotone voice travelled best across large rooms. In the chamber empty of any furnishing, the walls echoed his words loud enough for everyone to hear. “In charge for one minute and she kills everyone.”

Luo Binghe burst into laughter at the same time Sha Hualing started screeching. In his lap, shizun was politely covering his amusement behind a sleeve.

Mobei delivered the killing blow: “You are incapable of gastronomy.”

“What?”

“It is a human expression.”

“Oh, my king,” Airplane piped up, “Actually you would say that Sha Hualing ‘ain’t cooking shit.’” Sha Hualing’s blade-sharp nails dug into the table, peeling off the wood. The man clung tighter onto Mobei-Jun. “I’m sorry! I’m sorry! Pleasemykingdontletherkillme!”

At Shen Yuan’s age it was too late to cultivate a core - unless, he found the Second Soul’s Awakening, brewed its petals into a tea, and dual cultivated with a heavenly demon. Shen Yuan didn’t need convincing; at the mention of exploring his world and gaining powers, his eyes lit up and he agreed. The two of them left for the Cave of Immortal Lovers a few days after arriving.

Refusing to use Xin Mo unless absolutely necessary, Luo Binghe retrieved a greatsword from his treasury, one wide enough for them both to sit on comfortably during their travels. Air

was thinner higher up in the sky, so he kept the sword only a meter or so off the ground in consideration of Shen Yuan's fragile lungs. Flying too fast would have the same effect, so their pace was slightly faster than the average walker.

And since their trip had been extended by several hours in the sun, Binghe had to hold up a lacy parasol to protect shizun from the sun.

"Does this even count as flying?" Shizun complained. "It's more like a bike ride!"

Moments after they arrived at their destination, a wall of ice fell over the entrance, blocking all sunlight and throwing the cave into darkness.

Luo Binghe summoned a flame in the palm of his hand, lighting the area around them. Shen Yuan placed his hand against the barrier as he searched for a way to undo the action. "We're trapped?"

"There must be a way out of here," Binghe said coolly. Turning his attention back to the tablet, he moved closer to illuminate the words. Words of a long-lost demon language were etched into the stone slab.

Shizun joined him at his side. "What does it say?"

"It's a story," Binghe read over the fable for his teacher. "Once upon a time, a demon fell madly in love with another. However their respective clans were at war, so they could not be together…" Skimming over the story, he reached the end. "In the end, they were chased and killed in this very cave,"

"Ah," shizun commented. "Romeo and Juliet rip-off."

"The final line says this: 'Only when two from different worlds can set aside their differences and coexist for a night, the Flower shall reveal itself.'"

Shen Yuan sighed. "So basically, the two of us have to be alone in the dark together without fighting. And let me guess," he continued dryly, "the only way to stay warm is to hold each other tight."

Binghe shifted closer until their sides were pressed together. "In this cave of ice, this disciple is already starting to feel cold…"

Shen Yuan pinched the bridge of his nose. "These wife plots are getting lazier by the minute. When I see Airplane again, I swear, I'll break his limbs…!"

The growing grin on the demon lord's face fell away instantly. Binghe sniffled and grabbed onto Shen Yuan's arm while he whined. "Shizun! You'll hit him but not me?"

"Masochist," Shen Yuan grumbled as he took his seat on a nearby log. "Good thing I packed ramen in my pouch, or we'd be hungry all night."

Binghe moved a spare tree stump to the middle of the cavern, transferring the fire in his palm onto the wood. Once the flame had grown large enough to light up their surroundings and

provide enough heat, Binghe slid onto the log next to his shizun. “I have a suggestion,” he said, “but shizun won’t like it…”

Shen Yuan took out a fan and hid his face. “At least let this one hear Binghe’s suggestion before he decides on this one’s behalf.”

It was a game they played. Binghe would shyly make a suggestion. Shen Yuan would smack him with a fan and say *‘shameless!’* , even if it was something he actually wanted. Binghe would pester him until Shen Yuan pretended to give in to his husband's demands.

Binghe settled in for a long series of faux-denials. "Shizun can eat me if he’d like," Binghe said.

The fire crackled loudly in place of a response from Shen Yuan. Binghe waited patiently for an answer, but his husband just stared at the flames.

"Shizun can eat me," he repeated himself, in case Shen Yuan hadn’t heard. "A heavenly demon can easily regenerate his body." Binghe squeezed his arms around his master as he breathed in the lovely scent of Shen Yuan's hair. "This Binghe can provide shizun with anything he needs… I'll cook myself just the way you like it, shizun… how about a braised leg tonight?"

Binghe sighed happily, imagining the delightful pain that would accompany him ripping his body apart. Blood and injury had always been a part of his life- but for Shen Yuan, it could become a way to express his love. Shen Yuan always turned pain into something loveable.

“...as I was saying,” shizun finally spoke up, “I have cup noodles from my world, and we can just melt the ice for water-”

“Shizun, what about my idea?”

“I didn't hear it,” Shen Yuan lied bluntly. “Break some ice-”

Binghe sniffled, turning teary eyes to his teacher. "Shizun, shizun, please, just a little bit? You can steal my heart, but not eat it…?"

"You're literally insane," Shen Yuan breathed out.

Binghe beamed at the words. "And yet shizun married me anyway… he really loves me…"

Happy to talk about something else, shizun grabbed the change in topic quickly. "I was thinking," Shen Yuan said, "we should get married in my world as well."

" *Yes."* Binghe nuzzled into his lover. "Yes, absolutely, this lord wants to marry Shen Yuan a thousand times-"

"Two is enough," he smacked him lightly with his fan.

Neither of them wanted to stick around the wedding longer than necessary. Shen Yuan's thin face was near its breaking point under that veil, and they were both anticipating consummating their marriage - so halfway through a performance, Binghe stood from his seat, picked his wife up in his arms, and ran off.

"Binghe!" Shizun pulled off the veil, flustered in his arms.

"Apologies, shizun," Binghe answered. "This disciple cannot wait!"

Binghe practically ran to the emperor's chamber, kicking the door closed behind him before gently placing Shen Yuan on the bed. His wife looked beautiful in red, with a gown fit for the new empress of the combined realms.

Shizun huffed, turning his nose up at Binghe. "You call yourself a disciple, but stand so tall before your master?"

Once the words registered in his mind, Binghe flung himself onto his knees before Shen Yuan.

"Better," Shen Yuan commented. It wasn't praise- *better* was not *good* . But Binghe always went a little delirious at the smallest of acknowledgments from his darling husband.

The tip of Shen Yuan's shoe traced up Binghe's neck, up his Adam's apple. Once it reached his chin, Binghe happily nuzzled into the side of the shoe with his face.

Shen Yuan allowed him to for a few seconds, then dropped his foot back onto the ground. Binghe whimpered at the loss but didn't dare voice any dissatisfaction.

"Strip," Shen Yuan ordered. Binghe's cock was already half hard with the dominating act shizun was putting on for him. He threw off his wedding suit so quickly that Shen Yuan jumped in surprise from his eagerness.

Whatever bravado he'd put on had quickly run out, and with Binghe pawing at his dress, Shen Yuan was back to being his usual skittish self. He whined as shizun swung open a fan to hide behind. "Shizun! This disciple wants to see shizun, too!"

"Get to it, then," Shen Yuan hissed in embarrassment, and Binghe pounced on him. He pulled down each layer slowly, relishing in every inch of Shen Yuan's gorgeous skin as it was revealed. "We'll be here all night at that rate."

Binghe pressed a soft kiss to shizun's exposed shoulder. "We will indeed be here all night."

"Smartass," Shen Yuan muttered, then squealed in surprise when Binghe pulled the robes off in a swift motion.

Taking in Shen Yuan's body, Binghe's heart thumped excitedly. After so many trysts with so many women, he'd never thought he'd feel this way again: nervous, but eager to perform, like it was his first time… though technically, it was his first time with a man.

Binghe wanted to explore every inch of Shen Yuan's body for his *own* sake. He wanted to tie Shen Yuan up in Immortal Binding Cable and make sure shizun could never run away from him. He wanted to spend all night teasing Shen Yuan and watching his different reactions. He wanted to make him cry, and fuck him until Shen Yuan couldn't even beg him to stop anymore. He wanted to have an encyclopedic knowledge of shizun's body and own it completely.

He wanted-

Oh, Luo Binghe thought deliriously, *this is what it's like to want someone.*

"Shizun looks beautiful," Binghe whispered - not for the sake of flattery, or to paint himself as a romantic - but simply because Shen Yuan truly looked beautiful.

He'd never thought bedding someone could be so liberating. Could he really say whatever came to mind without judgement?

"Shizun, I love you." Binghe breathed out. "Shizun is so beautiful. Shizun, please, allow this servant to belong to you forever…"

Shen Yuan blushed. "What's gotten into you?"

Binghe leaned down to Shen Yuan's pale neck, breathing in his scent appreciatively before pressing his lips to his husband's throat. One kiss became two, and soon Bingh had kissed his way to Shen Yuan's chest. His shizun gasped as Binghe took his pert nipple in hand, gently teasing it between his fingers.

"Binghe!" Shen Yuan shyly crossed his bare legs, looking up at his husband (husband!) like a bullied maiden.

"Shizun," Binghe whispered. "Won't shizun call for his husband?"

The flush on his lover's face deepened, and Shen Yuan turned his face to the side.

Binghe easily parted Shen Yuan's legs, pressing his fingers into the entrance.

"Ah!"

Binghe's heart jumped in excitement at that stifled groan, but disappointment quickly took over when he saw Shen Yuan's pained face. "Shizun, what's wrong?"

"It-it's fine," Shizun insisted, but his clenched jaw and heavy breathing couldn't be hidden from Binghe's eyes. After a pause, he continued, "I think it needs to be wet."

Wet… Binghe pulled back. Right, this wasn't someone whose body could lubricate on its own.

"Binghe?" Shen Yuan propped himself onto his elbows when Binghe lowered himself onto his knees and elbows. "What are you- *Binghe!"*

Grabbing Shen Yuan’s hips, Binghe pulled him back until Shen Yuan’s taint was presented for Binghe to feast on.

The first swipe of his tongue made shizun cry out with a loud “AH!” before he pressed a hand against his lips.

“Don’t hide your voice , shizun…” Binghe whispered before diving back between his shizun’s cheeks.

Shen Yuan tried to squirm away, but Binghe quickly squeezed his husband’s hips and pulled him closer again. Shizun's back slid down the silk bedding easily, bringing him snug against him. Binghe gave those lovely jade legs one more appreciative glance before throwing them over his shoulders.

“Shizun, look here.”

Shen Yuan glanced down before immediately closing his eyes shut in embarrassment.

Binghe licked a broad stripe over his taint. “Shizun tastes so sweet…”

“Shut up!”

Binghe grinned, and nuzzled closer. Shen Yuan’s legs tightened around his head with each swipe of the tongue, until Binghe finally felt a hand grab his hair. He smile and pushed his tongue inside, relishing in his husband’s gasp.

“Binghe!” Shen Yuan cried. “Enough, do it already!”

“As shizun wishes,” Binghe said excitedly. Sitting upright to loom over Shen Yuan, Binghe pushed himself into the wet hole.

Even with Binghe’s spit coating him, there was still too much resistance. Even the cockhead hadn’t fully entered, and Shen Yuan already looked faint, gritting his teeth together. Cold sweat ran down his blanched face and his eyes begged for the pain to end. Binghe couldn’t take it anymore. “Shizun, I… I’m going to pull out…”

“Agh!” Shizun bit down on his hand to stifle any more groans.

It was almost harder to slide out - it seemed like any lubricant from Binghe’s mouth was quickly drying, and Shen Yuan’s insides sucked his pullar so closely, Binghe feared they’d be pulled out as well.

Shen Yuan breathed heavily in relief when they separated. The two of them sat on the bed, unable to look at the other in embarrassment.

Eventually Binghe spoke up, “Perhaps… shizun should be the one to do it?”

“I refuse!” Shizun answered immediately.

“Shizun dislikes being on top?”

“Of course not!” Shen Yuan snapped. “In what world would I want to be the shou!?” He huffed and pulled at the bed covers shyly. “I… I just don’t want to hurt Binghe, that’s all.”

Binghe frowned. Shen Yuan wasn’t as large as him; any damage would be minimal compared to what Binghe could do. Not to mention, Binghe was a heavenly demon! Any injuries he could possibly sustain would heal immediately.

At this rate, they'd never get anywhere. It was much better for shizun to risk hurting Binghe than for them to never be intimate at all!

In his excitement to say all this at once, Binghe blurted, "Shen Yuan's tiny pillar could never hurt a heavenly demon."

Even the wind outside came to a stop, as if to amplify the crushing silence that followed his statement.

Shen Yuan breathed in deeply, fury apparent in his eyes. “Get out.”

“Shizun, I didn't mean-”

"Out!" Shen Yuan screamed.

Kicked out of the emperor's chambers, Binghe stared off into the long, cold hallway of the palace. With nowhere else to go, he curled up in front of the door, like a dog that had been tossed out, and waited for his owner to allow him back inside.

He’d been sitting outside for only ten minutes when his husband opened the door.

“Come on,” Shen Yuan grumbled, “let’s go back to my world.”

The two huddled together to read from the small screen. Shen Yuan's thin face was in shambles as he typed ‘how to have gay sex without it hurting’ into his smartphone and clicked on the first article.

“Get tested,” Shen Yuan read out loud. “Uh, I mean, we don't need that, right?”

“This one is willing if it will aid Shen Yuan,” Binghe offered. Taking the opportunity to flirt, he slipped an arm around the man's slim waist. “But of course, I'll need shizun to help me study.”

Shen Yuan's lip twitched up. “You have no idea what an HIV test is, do you?”

“Is it not a written test?” When Shen Yuan shook his head, Binghe continued confidently: “I will pass any trial for Shen Yuan's sake, no matter the danger.”

Shizun burst into laughter.

The next piece of advice was, “Lube is a necessity, and lots of it.”

Shen Yuan cleared his throat. “O-okay, we'll pick up some at the store.”

“And toys,” Binghe continued.

“Huh?”

Binghe pointed at the screen. “It says using toys first can make it easier-”

“No.” Shen Yuan was blushing. “Just… no.”

Each suggestion was more and more difficult for Shen Yuan’s thin face to bear - and it came to a head when he saw the recommended sex position, urging the bottom to take charge.

Shen Yuan's face flushed bright red and he threw his phone away from him. “We are absolutely not doing anything like this!”

"But shizun needs to cultivate! How else will we be together forever?"

Shen Yuan hid his face behind a pillow. "That-that's fine, I can just die."

It was clearly a joke, but... tears fell down Luo Binghe’s face. "That's not funny, shizun."

Shen Yuan blinked in confusion before his expression turned to guilt.

"Shizun, that's really not funny at all." Binghe sobbed into Shen Yuan's chest. "Don't leave me..."

“Okay, okay, shizun is sorry.” Shen Yuan quickly wrapped his arms around Binghe’s shoulders, pulling him into the embrace. “We can do… all those things…” When Binghe excitedly lifted his head, Shen Yuan laughed. “Is Binghe sure he isn't just a big puppy?”

Binghe purred contently under Shen Yuan's administrations. “This Binghe would happily wear a collar for shizun.”

“Shameless!” Shen Yuan rapped his fan against his husband's head, but it was too late- Binghe had already seen the aroused way shizun’s small Adam's apple bobbed at the thought.

With a blue face mask, a baseball cap, sunglasses, and a monochrome black outfit, Shen Yuan’s body was completely covered. Ironically, this drew more attention to him.

“Is that guy about to rob a sex shop?” A woman whispered to her partner closeby. Shen Yuan pulled his hat lower in embarrassment.

Technology in shizun’s world was even more advanced than Binghe had previously imagined. He held the vibrating phallus on display in awe, until his eyes were caught by the many ‘costumes’ on the wall. He wanted to buy everything at this store, and see it all used on his husband!

“Let’s just get what we came for,” Shen Yuan mumbled as if he could read Binghe’s thoughts.

The lube was easy to find - shizun didn’t even say a word as Binghe picked up the ‘anal training kit.’

“Ah, great selection,” the friendly cashier said. “For a small price, would you like to buy a warranty for the anal set? If something goes wrong, you’ll have two years to get a replacement!”

“It-it’s not for me!” Shen Yuan squeaked out. “It's for my cousin!”

She slowed her typing on the computer. “Just so you know…” The woman hesitated before continuing, “I know it’s embarrassing to buy buttplugs, but it sounds way weirder to say you're buying lube and sex toys for your cousin.”

Shen Yuan ran out of the store. Luo Binghe took the bag and followed after his thin faced husband.

“Let’s just do this,” Shen Yuan said as he threw his shirt to the floor.

Binghe took a moment to admire his shizun’s slim back before moving closer. “Shizun, let this disciple help…”

“Are you really going to call me shizun while we do this?” Shen Yuan squirmed as Binghe unbuttoned his pants from behind. Binghe’s hands slid under the fabric and over Shen Yuan’s skin, letting his palm squeeze and caress as he pulled both the underwear and slacks down slowly. Once they were pooling around Shen Yuan’s feet, Binghe’s hands reached back up, groping his lover’s chest. “Binghe…”

This wasn’t Binghe’s first time seeing the man naked, but it brought a special thrill to know this was the body of his one and only spouse now - and soon they were going to complete the final rite of their union.

Binghe whined when Shen Yuan pushed away from the embrace. He took a seat at the edge of the bed, looking at Binghe expectantly. “Your turn.”

Binghe stripped his clothes efficiently, too riled up to tease Shen Yuan - they could do that in the future. At this moment, he wanted to make love to his husband!

Shen Yuan's eyes widened as Binghe kicked off his pants.

"Hell no!" He cried. He shifted away from Binghe, pulling a pillow over himself to cover his body. "That's way too big! I refuse!"

Binghe processed the rejection. Being refused after coming all this way was disappointing, but… "I understand if that is shizun's decision," Binghe said.

"You… what?"

"We can do other things!" Binghe continued enthusiastically as his knee climbed onto the bed. "I can use my mouth on you again, but on your pillar this time-"

"No!" Shizun cried. "You've dubconned so many girls! Since when do you stop when someone asks you to!?"

"Dubcon?" Binghe repeated.

Shen Yuan shut his mouth quickly, avoiding Binghe's gaze.

Ah. He felt foolish for not figuring it out earlier, when he knew how shy Shen Yuan could be. "Shizun doesn't want it?" He moved closer until he was towering over his shizun. "Too bad."

Shen Yuan shuddered, but relief was clear on his face.

One day, Binghe wanted shizun to be comfortable with their marital duties. He wanted shizun to initiate, and enjoy himself without shame. Binghe knew he'd have to wait for some time before such a thing could happen, but they were immortals- Luo Binghe was Shen Yuan's husband for eternity.

He truly would… have a loving shizun forever. Tears were rolling down Luo Binghe's cheeks before he even noticed his vision blurring. Shen Yuan's thumb was wiping the drops right away, fussing over him. "Okay, okay," shizun confessed in a panic, "I don't actually mind, stop crying!"

Suppressing a smile, Binghe sniffled. "Shizun wants Binghe?"

Shen Yuan stuttered out, "Yeah, yes, so- so don't be sad."

"Shizun doesn't think this disciple is too big?"

"No, Binghe is fine…"

"Shizun wants to ride this Binghe? Does shizun need it that badly?"

"..."

Shen Yuan turned away, until Binghe could only laugh at the red ears visible from behind. He pounced on the fleeing man, pinning his lover's body to the mattress. "Shizun, were you trying to run away?" Shen Yuan gasped when Binghe nosed at his back, pressing small kisses up his neck. "Shizun should know there's no escaping from his husband."

"You…!"

When Shen Yuan looked over his shoulder to glower at him, Binghe leaned in to kiss his husband. Shen Yuan made small groan before his lips were moving against Binghe's, and parting to let his tongue inside.

Without separating, Binghe groped Shen Yuan's ass. Shen Yuan pulled back with a gasp when Binghe playfully smacked one cheek, but didn't protest at the treatment.

"Let's begin preparing shizun," Binghe suggested.

Shen Yuan nodded, and positioned himself onto his hands and knees. Binghe frowned and pushed his shizun onto his back.

"Binghe!"

"This way will be better," Binghe insisted. "I need to be able to see any discomfort in shizun's face. The website said so."

That was partially the truth - really, Binghe couldn't bear to miss seeing his husband's expressions during their first time.

Shizun let Binghe manhandle him with an accusatory glare.

He uncapped the lubricant bottle, pouring it over his fingers until it dripped onto the sheets. If all went well, though, that would be the least of the mess they'd be making tonight.

Binghe smeared lube over Shen Yuan's taint, smiling as the hole twitched. With his wet fingers, he teasingly rubbed the outside until Shen Yuan cried, "Put them in already!"

"As shizun demands," Binghe agreed. One finger pushed through with some resistance, made easier with the slick fluid. Shen Yuan squeezed tightly around it, and Binghe's cock throbbed as he imagined it inside his husband instead.

Shen Yuan groaned as the second finger forced itself inside, but now that Binghe could scissor his walls open, Shen Yuan's breathing had grown heavy.

When a finger hit a particularly soft part, Shen Yuan gasped loudly, squeezing tightly. Binghe grinned as he focused onto shizun's prostate, rubbing the pads of his fingers against it.

Despite his gentle fingering, the effect was already apparent on his shizun's face. His hands were clenched in the bedsheets, and soft "ah, hah" sounds were escaping him. Binghe didn't know when Shen Yuan closed his eyes, but he did feel the moment his husband began pushing his hips back onto Binghe's fingers.

“Shizun,” Binghe cooed. “Does my wife feel good?”

Shen Yuan’s eyes peaked open, clouded. “Don’t… oh, don’t use shizun and wife in- *ahh,* interchangeably!”

However, the first time during this tryst when Shen Yuan sounded genuinely offended was when Binghe pulled his fingers out.

“Binghe!” Shizun whined. His husband looked up at him with bullied eyes, making Binghe’s stomach turn in excitement.

“Don’t worry, shizun,” Binghe cooed. “Your husband won’t leave shizun empty for long.”

Retrieving the first toy of the anal training kit, Binghe lathered it in lubricant before pushing it where his fingers had been moments ago. Even this tiny fake phallus could barely be squeezed into shizun’s opening.

Shen Yuan tried to lift himself onto his elbows, but Binghe’s free hand grabbed both of his wrists, pinning them over his head. “Wha-what are you putting in there!?”

Binghe kissed his lips gently, putting more and more force behind the dildo until it plopped in. Shen Yuan inhaled sharply in shock, before crying out in surprise when the toy shifted.

“Does shizun feel stretched out?” Binghe asked sweetly. “This is the smallest one.”

Shen Yuan moaned as Binghe played with the toy, pulling and pushing it back and forth.

“Shizun is so beautiful.” Binghe fucked the toy into his husband a little faster, mesmerized by the tiny whimpers escaping him. “Even more beautiful when he has a cock filling him up.”

The resistance lessened with each thrust, until Shen Yuan was wet and loose enough for more. For all his prior objecting, Shen Yuan whined with remorse when the toy was pulled out. Binghe laughed at his needy shizun, desperately clenching around the plastic to keep it inside.

“No need to worry, shizun,” Binghe reassured teasingly. “This disciple is only changing it out for another.”

The second, larger toy slipped in slightly easier - Binghe smirked as he watched how desperately Shen Yuan pushed back onto the dildo. Binghe was about to burst with how badly he wanted to sheathe into his husband’s body, but it was a relief to know Shen Yuan was no better.

He pulled out the toy to the tip, looking over its size before shoving it back in. While his husband was moaning incoherently, Binghe still had his concerns- how could this prepare shizun properly? Even the largest toy was barely half his size.

…half his size.

“What!” Shen Yuan screamed. He looked down, eyes wide. “Binghe, what are you-!?”

Taking the largest toy, Binghe nudged it's head straight into Shen Yuan's hole without taking out the dildo currently filling it up. "Shizun, both of these combined together aren't as big as me," Binghe explained. "Going one by one won't be enough."

Shen Yuan's body trembled. "Wait, I- that's too much!"

"Shizun can take it," Binghe encouraged. He pushed the second toy, easily holding down Shen Yuan's struggling wrists. "Shh, shizun should be good and take whatever I give him, okay?"

Shen Yuan keened pathetically, shaking his hips erratically as the toy slowly eased into him. Once both the dildos were fully hidden in his husband's ass, Binghe released his hands.

"There, that's good," Binghe cooed. He rubbed his palm against Shen Yuan's bottom calmingly. "They're both inside, shizun. I knew you could do it."

Shen Yuan cried something out weakly, but Binghe couldn't make it out. The man under him had gone completely limp, ready to be used however Binghe pleased.

"Maybe I should take shizun out like this sometime?" Binghe teased. His hand played with the ends of the dildo's bases, twisting them inside Shen Yuan. "Everyone should know shizun is a slut that goes in public with two fake cocks in him."

The small wetness in Shen Yuan's eyes had become full tears by now. He blinked his wet lashes at Binghe pleadingly, until Binghe kindly pulled the two toys out half-way and thrust them back.

Shen Yuan's moans became less and less restrained the longer Binghe played with him. Shizun was truly stunning when he was lost in pleasure like this - his hair sticking to his sweaty forehead, his chest heaving with heavy breaths, his hips meeting each thrust of the toys… He could see shizun release his grip on the sheets, and lower his trembling hand between his thighs.

Binghe intercepted it before it could reach its destination. "Shizun, you can't cum yet." Shen Yuan whined pitifully, spurring Binghe's heart to beat even faster. This had no effect on the toy's pace however, and Binghe kept pushing and pulling the item slowly inside his husband. "Shizun can't finish because of a toy, I'll get jealous… you have to wait, okay shizun?"

Shen Yuan opened his mouth to protest, then bit his lip. The sight of his shizun debauched and looking up at him bashfully made Binghe's dick impossibly harder.

"Binghe," shizun finally begged, "please… no more…"

Binghe paused his movements, enjoying the sob Shen Yuan let out. "Didn't shizun say no more?"

Shen Yuan sniffled before begging, "Binghe, do it already…!"

"Do what, shizun?"

Binghe would have loved to stay there all night, bullying his shizun, but Shen Yuan's glassy eyes and wobbling lips were becoming almost too much for him to resist.

"Does shizun want this disciple to fuck him?" Binghe assisted. "Does shizun want this disciple's cock?"

Shen Yuan hiccuped pitifully before whimpering, "Yes!"

Binghe pulled out the toys, taking his place between Shen Yuan's legs. His dick had been waiting for so long, it was the hardest it had ever been.

Binghe perched Shen Yuan's thighs over his shoulders. Too light… he'd have to double his efforts in fattening up his husband.

The wet entrance teased the cock sliding between Shen Yuan's cheeks. Shen Yuan stiffened, his eyes wide as he felt the size of it again. "That thing will never fit inside."

Binghe squeezed Shen Yuan's hip reassuringly, while his words remained hostile. "Shizun will take it, whether he does so willingly or not."

Shen Yuan shivered, unconsciously grinding against Binghe.

Binghe breathed deeply to calm himself before he grabbed his cock and pushed the head against Shen Yuan's entrance. "Shizun is such a whore," he grunted. "Begging to be held down and violated."

"No, I-I'm not!" Shen Yuan insisted weakly.

They both gasped as the head pushed through, easing the rest of Binghe's pillar.

Binghe continued teasing his husband as he pressed in. *"Hah…* shizun, your body is perfect for breeding."

"What are you saying!?" Shen Yuan cried. "I'm a man!"

"Are you?" Binghe goaded. "What kind of man takes cock as well as you do?"

"Binghe!" Shen Yuan moaned. Binghe leaned over, practically folding Shen Yuan in half as he kissed him. Shizun's arms came up around Binghe's neck, holding tightly as tiny whimpers escaped him.

By the time Binghe bottomed out, small teardrops had coated Shen Yuan's eyelashes, and his lips had been kissed red.

Binghe pulled back to take in the view; the demonic part of him took joy in staking his claim on his mate. That was *Binghe* inside shizun. Shen Yuan laid a hand on his stomach, where the bulge was prominent. Half delirious, he slurred, "I think you rearranged my organs."

Binghe's body reacted on its own, thrusting forward at the words with excitement. Shen Yuan gasped, gripping onto Binghe's hand for dear life. His eyes watered further as he was clearly

overwhelmed and stretched to his limit.

Binghe’s hands groped his shizun’s body with hunger. Shen Yuan was too exhausted to pry the hands off him when his husband squeezed the light brown nipples on his chest, so Binghe took full advantage and tormented him until shizun mustered up his strength to scold the demon helplessly. “Binghe…!”

Shizun's cheeks were dyed bright pink, matching the kiss-swollen pink of his lips. Moaning helplessly under Binghe's onslaught, he wasn't even aware enough to close his mouth, with drool trailing down his chin. His half-lidded eyes were completely glazed over, the unshed wetness making them shine. Shen Yuan, at that moment, was the most beautiful thing he'd ever seen.

“Call me husband,” Binghe demanded as he pulled on the sensitive bud.

Binghe was certain shizun would require more bullying, but Shen Yuan stammered out,“Be gentler, hu-husband.”

Binghe couldn't restrain himself any longer. He buried his face into Shen Yuan's hair, and tightened his grip on his husband. Then he proceeded to fuck into him with abandon, jackrabbiting into shizun’s hole.

The sound that escaped Shen Yuan could only be described as a scream. Luo Binghe didn't slow his thrusts, continuing to plunge into him roughly. Shizun could do nothing but hang on while howling, “ *Binghe, Binghe, Binghe!”*

He kept repeating Binghe's name, like the recitation of long, long prayer. Binghe’s nerves would jump in ecstasy whenever the chanting of his name was interrupted by shizun moaning out something else. Like, “too much, too much!” or “I can't, I'll break, no- no more- ah!” or his personal favourite, when shizun would groan low and quiet, trying to muffle his words as he cried, “so good, Binghe, so good, don't stop…!”

Either way, his response to all of them was, “I won't stop, shizun, won't ever stop fucking shizun…”

Being inside Shen Yuan felt like heaven. Binghe never wanted to do anything but fuck his pretty wife ever again-

Judging by shizun’s whimper, he might have said that out loud.

“Shizun, do you want to cum?” Binghe’s hand wrapped around Shen Yuan’s cock. “Does my pretty little wife want to cum?”

Too far gone to fight against the humiliating words, the normally thin faced man nodded. “Yes! Yes, husband, please!”

Binghe groaned as he pumped his hand up and down his husband’s dick. After so much teasing, it only took a few moments for Shen Yuan to finish with a scream. Shen Yuan

tightened around Binghe so beautifully, the demon lord felt himself grow close to his own release.

Shen Yuan shrieked when he felt the thrusts continue against his sensitive prostate. “You-you’re not done?”

Binghe kissed Shen Yuan tears away. “Just a little more, shizun.”

“Can't,” Shen Yuan sobbed. “I can't… No more…”

Luo Binghe's teeth scraped against Shen Yuan's throat, nibbling down possessively. “You can… shizun is such a good wife for me.”

“But, but I-” Shizun mewled under every thrust before he finally shouted, “Husband, cum in your wife!”

The words were so unexpected, Binghe’s body seized, emptying inside Shen Yuan with an earth-shattering orgasm.

Binghe fell atop Shen Yuan, both of them struggling to catch their breaths, tangled in a sweaty heap.

“Shizun,” Binghe called softly. “You called yourself-”

Shen Yuan interrupted, “I only said that because I knew you’d take forever otherwise.”

“Okay,” Binghe said happily.

“Why do you look like you don’t believe me?”

“I believe everything shizun says.”

“Liar… hey… what’s that…?”

“How could this disciple hear such tempting words and be satisfied?”

“You’re still hard!?”

“Take responsibility, wife…”

“No way!”

As Binghe slowly drifted into consciousness, all he could feel was warmth; the soft body in his arms, the blanket draped over them, and the joy that radiated in his chest as he opened his eyes and remembered the night before.

He tightened the arms around Shen Yuan's waist- his husband's waist- and nuzzled into his neck, breathing in the scent.

The lazy spooning went on until shizun released a soft groan and shifted. Binghe smiled as he slowly opened his eyes. “Good morning, wife.”

“Mhm…” Shizun reached toward the nightstand, grumbling softly as he grabbed his glasses and slipped them on.

“Oh,” Shen Yuan whispered. Binghe watched him squint and blink repeatedly, significantly more awake, before he reached up to his face and removed the frames. “Oh my god.”

Binghe's husband stared at him, eyes wide. “Shizun?”

“I can see without them.” Shen Yuan explained in wonderment. He glanced out the window. “Not as far as I’ve read cultivators can see, though. I guess it just cancelled out and gave me normal vision…”

“It worked!” Binghe exclaimed excitedly. Shizun was a cultivator now! After a moment, he frowned. “But shizun will still wear his glasses right?”

“Why would I do that?”

“Because shizun looks sexy in them…”

Shen Yuan rolled his eyes, and reached for the night stand again, grabbing his phone. “Oh no.”

On his screen was a series of messages, by a contact saved as *‘mei^2’*.

1:06pm WHY is that bitch shihan asking for your number .

1:06pm She said you told her to ask me for it ???

1:06pm Did you forget what that SNAKE did to my presentation???

5:34pm ARE YOU LEAVING ME ON READ?

5:35pm because i know DAMN well you are not preoccupied by other responsibilities

8:59pm BRO.

8:59pm REPLY!??!

12:16am wtf you get a boyfriend and now you can't text me?

12:16am What the hell man

12:16am I hate you

2:48am Are you okay?

12:12pm not funny i'm starting to get worried :((

4:45pm YOURE SICK?????? AND YOURE LETTING YOUR WHORE TAKE CARE OF YOU INSTEAD OF A LICENSED PROFESSIONAL???

4:46pm LIKE OKAY SORRY FOR CALLING HIM A WHORE WE DONT SLUT SHAME BUT LIKE

4:46pm THAT FUCKING WHORE?????

6:23pm Okay I've calmed down im calm lets discuss this like adults

6:27pm i'm being fr the power of love or yaoi or whatever is not strong enough to protect your compromised immune system. For the love of god please call back your nurse and get care from someone who knows what theyre doing

The last message was sent a full day after the previous ones.

5:42pm I want your lame ass boyfriend to die so bad.

Time passed slower in his world, but it still passed. If Shen Yuan had been in Luo Binghe's world for two weeks, that was two days his family hadn't heard from him. Perhaps not a long time for anyone else, but for a sick young man doted on by his family, it was a miracle they hadn't kicked down his door by now.

Shen Yuan sat upright and Binghe whined from the loss. "Hold on, I gotta call her…"

She picked up after one ring. "Ge!"

“Are you fucking kidding me!?” Shen Yuan yelled into the phone. “I was gone for two days!”

Though Binghe could hear her voice, he ignored it to focus on shizun. His hand squeezed his husband's waist until Shen Yuan slapped it away.

“Where was I?” Shizun glanced at Binghe. “Uh… I… eloped.”

Binghe gasped. Shen Yuan seemed even more surprised by what had just come out of his own mouth.

“Yeah, that-that’s a thing people do!” Shizun’s face burned red. “People elope for two days and come back, it’s the latest TikTok trend. Sorry you’re so old and out of touch you don’t get it- no, wait, no- don’t tell mom, *please-!!”*

Shen Yuan locked his phone and covered his face with his hands. “Everyone’s gonna be here in an hour and I can’t even walk.”

Binghe smirked, pulling his shizun into his arms. “You mean they’ll be here in seven hours.”

Shen Yuan looked up. “Huh?”

“Time passes by slower in my world… would you like a few more hours of sleep at my palace before we return here to speak with your family?”

Shen Yuan’s eyes shone. “Go get Xin Mo.”

A month after their wedding, Luo Binghe deemed Shen Yuan’s core strong enough to test out. They flew to a forest near the palace, one less touched by the merging of the realms than most - though shizun was delighted by each grotesque invasive demon and plant he saw.

Though the tremors going through shizun’s body didn’t seem to be only from excitement. Binghe frowned as he ordered his blood mites to calm down Shen Yuan’s stressed heart. “This lord doesn’t understand… why is shizun still unwell after becoming a cultivator?”

“Well, that makes sense.” They paused their trek through the woods as Shen Yuan explained. “In your world, dual cultivating solves magical issues like Without A Cure… if you were curing everyday things like asthma, that would be pretty boring.” Binghe frowned, but shizun quickly soothed him with some headpats. “Silly boy, I have the stamina of a cultivator now. Though I may not be fully cured, flare-ups will be much rarer and easier to manage.”

Seeing Binghe’s uncertainty, Shen Yuan placed his fan under Binghe’s chin, lifting up his face.

“Besides, won’t Binghe be here to look after me?” Shen Yuan questioned in a teasing voice.

Binghe blushed. “Of… of course, shizun! This husband will always take care of shizun!”

“Good.” Shen Yuan continued walking, Binghe snapping out of his daze to catch up. “Now, show me how to make a qi blast.”

Twenty minutes later, the two of them stared in shock at the crater where the mountain used to be.

“What…” Shen Yuan stared at his hand. “Did I just…”

“Shizun has been dual cultivating with a heavenly demon,” Binghe pointed out. “Such an act would raise cultivation by multitudes if done even once… and shizun and I have been dual cultivating *very* often-”

Shen Yuan paled as he shut Binghe up with a smack. “You mean I’m this powerful now!? Binghe, this is too much, I- I don’t even know cultivation, I could really hurt someone!”

Luo Binghe asked hopefully, “like me?”

Shizun smacked his head once more with his fan. “Why do you look so excited!?”

Shen Yuan and Luo Binghe agreed to have a second wedding in Shen Yuan’s world, one that his family could attend. Binghe commissioned the finest artisans to create his newest wedding suit, luxurious phoenix robes even grander than what he’d worn when he made his shizun empress.

Shiuzun’s family did not agree with his choice in wedding attire.

Shen Mei had been holding back tears since the moment she stepped into the dressing room. “What the *hell* are you wearing?”

“Is this a costume?” Shen An lifted the long heavy hem of Luo Binghe’s golden sleeve, and weighed the fabric in his hand. “Incredible quality. Where did you buy this?”

Shen Ming leaned down and whispered to his sister, “I can’t tell, is this good or bad?”

“Bad, obviously!” She cried.

Shen Ming stood upright again and barked at Binghe, “Yeah, how can you not know what you’re wearing looks like shit!?”

The three siblings’s attacks were relentless, not giving him a moment to speak up.

“Is that a damn mianguan?” Shen Mei held her head in her hands. “Please tell me this is a joke and you have your actual wedding suit here.”

Binghe's pride was a little wounded. "What's wrong with this?"

"I'll call my stylist. It won't be perfect, but he'll get us something to wear." Shen An already had his phone in his hands, ever reliable for fixing mistakes in an instant. He glanced back at Binghe with his phone pressed to his ear. "Uh, size…?"

"What the hell are you waiting for!?" Shen Ming barked. "Take that off!"

Luo Binghe scrambled to remove his many layers.

"I'll measure him!" Shen Mei unrolled a tape measure from her bag and held it across his shoulders. "Thank the heavens we insisted on seeing their outfits before the wedding," she muttered under her breath. "Imagine if he showed up in front of all our business partners like this? We'd be a laughing stock…"

"This lo- I was assured this was the finest wedding suit possibly made."

Shen Mei laughed under her breath. "Maybe two thousand years ago."

Shen Yuan's family already disapproved of him, and even on the wedding day, he'd just made their opinion of him worse. A few months ago, he would have no regard for a wife's family - but these people were vital for Shen Yuan's happiness, so Binghe hung his head. "My deepest apologies for burdening you all…"

The three Shens gaped at Luo Binghe.

Eventually, it was Shen Ming who punched Binghe's bicep lightly and said, "Are you an idiot? What burden? You're our brother."

Binghe blinked in surprise.

"You can ask us for help." Shen An smiled. "You're part of the Shen family now."

"Yeah, and we can't be seen associated with someone who dresses like *this."* Shen Mei gestured to the gown, removed and placed on a nearby chair. "So of course we have to make sure you look alright - we've got your back."

Binghe swallowed around the lump growing in his throat. "Family…?" He choked out. His three new siblings-in-law smiled back at him. When Binghe finally burst into tears, they screamed at one another in panic.

"Why did you hit him!?"

"Wha- I barely touched him!"

"Make him stop! Ge is gonna be mad at us if he sees this!"

Mere moments after Shen Mei's warning, the door opened. Shen Yuan walked in with a beautifully sleek tang suit, embroidered with subtle gold thread - the complete opposite of the

ostentatious robes Binghe had been wearing a few moments ago. “Binge- oh you guys are here.”

Shen Yuan’s eyes met Binghe’s teary ones, and his siblings froze like deer in headlights. The tense silence was shattered when Shen Yuan screeched, *“What did you all do!?”*

Every day living as Shen Yuan’s husband filled Binghe with joy. They visited Shen Yuan’s family home often, and Binghe listened to childhood stories with glee while shizun blushed by his side, pleading for his mother to stop. Every so often, they returned to Binghe’s world, where Shen Yuan excitedly showed off his new powers and studied the wild creatures exclusive to the merged realms.

They only stayed away for so long before returning home. Home, to Binghe, was now a small apartment with a TV, a fridge full of fresh ingredients, and of course, the Luo Binghe plushie that sat on the wall.

After Binghe moved into shizun’s bedroom, organizing their belongings led him back to that stash of *merchandise* . “Now that shizun has married this lord, why hide your fondness?” Binghe said contently. Shen Yuan had groaned, flustered, but didn’t stop Binghe from proudly displaying it in their shared bedroom.

“What’s wrong?” Shizun asked one night.

Binghe stared at the plush, surrounded by identical figurines and standees of himself. “Something is missing…”

So when Shen Yuan decided to accompany his sister to an event for the day, Binghe gathered his materials and got to work with a needle in hand.

He hadn't done anything like this since he was a child. It brought pain to his heart to remember those days, when he'd stitch rips in his and his mother's simple clothing so they'd have something to wear. But now that he was doing something like this for *joy* rather than necessity… Binghe smiled to himself. His mother would be happy if she could see him.

The repetitive back and forth of each stitch was calming in a way he’d rarely felt before marrying his husband. In no time, he’d embroidered a likeness to Shen Yuan’s warm brown eyes on the fabric before moving onto cutting and sewing tiny robes. Maybe in the future, he’d create more than one outfit… that way xiao-shizun could wear something new everyday!

After two hours, the finished cotton-stuffed plush wore an extravagant green silk dress, looking nearly comical against the felt fabric of its skin. A tiny Shen Yuan with cartoonishly large eyes stared back at him with a smile.

The front door opened. “Binghe, I'm home! What's for dinner?”

Finished just in time! Binghe placed shizun’s plushie next to the one of him. The two dolls sat on the shelf, leaning against each other to stay upright.

Perfect.

After all, no Luo Binghe should be without his Shen Yuan.

Chapter End Notes

as always thanks to slug for betaing!

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!